

HOW
NOT TO
SUMMON
—A—
DEMON
LORD

VOLUME
13

Yukiya Murasaki
Illust. Takahiro Tsurusaki

VISIT...

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**“Diablo!
Kiss me
too!”**

**“...Nng... Doing
this together is
embarrassing on a
whole other level...”**



"A Demon Lord's power... I can feel it... Aaah!"

"Heheh, do you like the taste of this Demon Lord's power, Diablo?"

Alicia
stomped on
the tentacle,
hard enough
to produce
noise.

“So ugly!”





CHARACTERS



A top player of a game very similar to this world. He is in fact socially inept, and can't communicate without acting the part of his in-game character.
AKA: "The Demon Lord from Another World"



A Pantherian summoner. The Demon Lord Krebskulm was sealed in her body, but she finally removed her after much hardship. Serious to a fault.



Princess of the Elves. Choosing Diablo as the king of her country, she finally became queen. Claims to be a summoner, but is a much more skilled archer. Speaks in a light, easygoing fashion.



The High Priest who stands as the highest authority of the church. Diablo saved her from the Cardinal Authority's devious plots, and has worshipped him as an avatar of God ever since.



A duke's daughter and an Imperial Knight who despises the races, despite her standing. Was captured by the Empire and placed within the Magimatic Sol Goldinus.



The Kingdom of Lyferia's minister, who has betrayed their homeland. Currently on the run with the Order of Palace Knights.

A powerful demon who once conspired to revive the Demon Lord Krebskulm. Now spends her days working to pay for Klem's biscuits.



The strongest Demon Lord, Krebskulm. She is now an innocent girl who loves biscuits.

c o n t e n t s

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The Story So Far—

In the MMORPG *Cross Reverie*, Takuma Sakamoto was overwhelmingly powerful, and was able to role play so well that his performances were more boss-like than the actual bosses of the game. For this reason, he came to be known as the “Demon Lord.”

By defeating the Demon Lord of the Mind, Enkvaros, faster than anyone else, he obtained the super rare item, the 《Demon Lord’s Ring》. It was one of the ultimate pieces of equipment in the game, able to reflect all types of magic.

Then, one day, Takuma found himself summoned to a world that looked exactly like *Cross Reverie*! Having performed the ritual magic at the same time, the Pantherian, Rem, and the Elf, Shera, fought over which one of them was his Summoner.

But thanks to the Demon Lord’s Ring he wore, the magic was reflected, so the Enslavement Collar meant for him clamped onto the two girls instead!

Faced with Rem and Shera arguing, Takuma was at a loss of what to do. While he may have been a superior player back in the game, he couldn’t talk with other people if his life depended on it. After struggling with what to say, the words that came out of his mouth matched the Demon Lord role play he had used in the game:

“Cease your pointless squabbling. You are in the presence of Diablo.”

Diablo soon after found himself foiling an invasion of one hundred Fallen led by a Fallen named Edelgard, as well as an attack from within the city of Faltra at the hands of the Fallen Gregore. Diablo then later found himself the recipient of a quest from the governor of Faltra, Galford. Prince Keera of the Elven Kingdom of Greenwood demanded Shera be returned to him, threatening open war with Faltra should they fail to comply. The details of Galford’s quest were simply to find a way to avoid the war. The bespectacled, straight-and-narrow Imperial Knight Alicia was assigned to the group as an observer to watch over their actions.

Using the 《Marionette's Flute》, Keera manipulated Shera and unleashed a forbidden Summon called the Force Hydra—yet Diablo still managed to rescue her.

After her rescue, the group set off to resurrect the Demon Lord Krebskulm trapped inside Rem. But in the process, Krebskulm had lost a portion of her memories as a Demon Lord, being reduced to a biscuit-loving young girl, who was then nicknamed “Klem.”

Peaceful days passed by...

Suddenly, Alicia betrayed the group! Now awakened as a true Demon Lord, Klem went into a destructive frenzy. But thanks to one of Diablo's ultimate spells and the sound of Rem and Shera's voices, Klem was subdued and reverted to her biscuit-loving form. To ensure Klem would never go berserk again, Diablo bound her with the same enslavement magic afflicted upon Shera and Rem.

Through a string of coincidences, or perhaps God's own guidance, Diablo found himself rescuing Lumachina, a holy woman, from the Paladin Gewalt. Being a High Priest, Lumachina was the highest ranking member of the Church. However, due to her attempts at ridding the Church of corruption and avarice, she was nearly assassinated. Still seeking to reform the corrupt church, Lumachina sought the help of the Paladin Captain Batutta, setting out to meet him in Zircon Tower.

Traveling through the perilous expanse of the former Demon Lord's Domain, Diablo's group of Adventurers accompanied her as bodyguards. After a long journey, they arrived at their destination, and were greeted by Batutta.

While there, Diablo claimed back his own dungeon, gained many pieces of helpful equipment and items, and fought off the new Demon Lord's army, gaining new allies in the process: the Grasswalker Horn and the magimatic maid Rose.

Shortly after, Horn decided to change classes and study to become a sorcerer, leaving for the magic academy.

They could not celebrate their victories, however. Having been informed that the Elven king, Shera's father, had passed away, the four traveled to her

homeland where Shera was already engaged to a pig-faced Elf called Drango (for the sake of the country, of course). Diablo thwarted the wedding, giving her a wedding ring and assuming the throne as the new king of Greenwood.

Diablo then fought and defeated his next great opponent, the Demon Overlord Modinaram. Saving Rem, who had been taken captive, he also gave her a wedding ring. But news of Diablo's heroic deeds reached the king of Lyferia, Delouche Xandros. Diablo attempted to ignore the order calling him for an audience with the king, but still begrudgingly found himself in the audience chamber.

What awaited him in the castle wasn't words of praise, but gazes full of suspicion. Left with no choice, Diablo accepted a quest from the king in order to guarantee the safety of him and his companions.

His quest led him to the southern frontier town of Caliture, Rem's hometown, where her family — a clan of martial artists known as the Gadou Clan — resided. There, Rem's aunt, Solami, trained him in the use of the Glow.

The objective of his quest was to slay a clan of Kobolds, but Diablo ended up befriending the creatures and turning against the Kingdom of Lyferia. But before things could develop any further, the Gelmed Empire invaded Lyferia from the east!

Gelmed's elite soldiers and commander, Aira, use Magimatic Sols, the same weapon Rose does. Lyferia's army took to the battlefield to oppose them, led by the king himself. However, Lyferia's efforts ended in spectacular defeat, and the King of Lyferia perished in combat.

The prime minister, Noah Gibun, fled the country with the Order of Palace Knights. Meanwhile, the Gelmed Empire's armies laid siege to the capital, Sevenwall. The twelfth district and the Grand Cathedral somehow manage to push the enemy back, but...

It seems Rem is the 'Girl of the Vessel' the Empire is after, and she is pursued insistently by the enemy. Diablo steels his resolve, destroys the Magimatic Sols pursuing Rem, and slays his enemies to save her. At the same time, Alicia is captured by the Gelmed Empire and experimented on, being thrown into Goldinus of the Gold. The Magimatic Sol, which had consumed all who had

previously attempted to use it, accepts her as its compatible user.

Alicia looked around the room, her eyes burning with red.

“...So ugly.”

The first words Goldinus of the Gold uttered.

Chapter 1: Erina Reufelia

The smell of the battlefield hung in the air. With the city reduced to a smoldering mess, the scents of blood and iron hardly lingered. It was mostly the distinct aroma of trees, cloth, and coal burning. Despite it being past noon, the sky was darkened by the dark clouds blotting out the sun.

Both friend and foe lay dead by the dozens. The Empire had apparently withdrawn its army, and the sounds of combat were dying out. The Church's soldiers cheered at having successfully defended the twelfth district, but judging by those lying dead on the ground, it was clear who was the true winner of this battle. Lyferia's side was vastly inferior.

Using his 《Flight》 magic, Diablo flew up to the Inner Sanctum.

This is what war means.

This wasn't the first time Diablo had seen something like this. He'd fought off the Demon Lord's Army in Zircon Tower, and took part in defending Faltra from the Demon Overlord's invasion. But this was the first time he'd fought in a war between the races, and the unbearable sights filled Diablo with an intense feeling of disgust.

At the same time, he was also overcome with relief. Relief at not losing someone dear to him in this fierce battlefield. Rem was in his arms.

"...Thank you, Diablo," she said.

"Hmph," he replied curtly.

He had no idea how a Demon Lord was supposed to respond in this situation. By acting grandly, Diablo claimed to be a Demon Lord from another world. But the truth of the matter was that on the inside, he was a shut-in gamer crippled by a communication disorder. Before coming to this world, he couldn't so much as hold a conversation with a girl, to say nothing of holding hands with one.

And while he did acknowledge that he'd gotten marginally better at speaking to people lately, he still had a long way to go. And yet, there he was, just a

moment ago...

Diablo recalled the events that unfolded earlier. Rem was nearly abducted by the enemies. When he'd seen her, lying with her legs crushed, Diablo was shaken. Regret and wrath overcame him, and so, silencing his fear and own sense of morals, he launched offensive spell after offensive spell, killing the enemy to rescue Rem.

When the healing item he used completely reversed her wounds, he was on the verge of weeping with relief. The emotions rushed over him, and...

No, that's just an excuse. I... I can't believe it. I... !

A different kind of shock jolted Diablo's mind.

I, I, I k-k-k-k-k-kissed her?!

Truth be told, this wasn't the first time he'd kissed a girl. He'd been kissed soon after being summoned as part of the 《Enslavement Ritual》, and Rem and Shera had kissed him after he fought off the Demon Overlord Modinaram.

But this was the first time Diablo had ever *initiated* a kiss. They both sought each other out, and out of a wish to confirm each other's presence, locked lips. Does such an act done between two lovers have a place in Diablo's life? Was this some kind of mistake? But even as he asked himself that, some part of Diablo did note that they were far beyond just being lovers at this point. There was, after all, a ring on Diablo's left hand.

A 《Marriage Ring》!

When he was playing *Cross Reverie* in his old life, he'd demolished any challenger that faced him wearing one of these rings with utter impunity. With all his might, and mercilessly enough to inflict trauma on them. Yet it all stemmed from envy.

Yeah. I was jealous!

He burned with maddening jealousy, and with the cold, calculated efficiency of a machine, he brought ruination upon them.

How does it feel now, normies?! Blow up and get the hell out of my game!

So he would shout at them. But right now, Diablo was agonized.

“Ugh... Am I the one who needs to blow up now...? No...”

“Are you all right, Diablo? Does it hurt anywhere?” Rem asked him in concern.

Diablo shook his head and managed to revert to his Demon Lord role play.

“It’s nothing! I just used some MP, is all... I’ll recover it later.”

He’d only experienced it since coming to this world, but MP wasn’t just magic points. It was his actual mental fortitude, and once he lost enough of it, he became emotionally feeble. Once, when he’d completely depleted his MP, he became so lethargic he slept entire days away. He had a large supply of potions prepared now, so that wasn’t a problem anymore.

So this current feeling of discomposure must have been because he’d lost quite a bit MP. *Yes, that must be it*, Diablo concluded. He couldn’t afford to stay restless. The war wasn’t over yet, and he stood to lose Rem if he didn’t emerge the victor. And not just her — Shera and his other comrades were in danger, too.

But most of all, he didn’t want this gruesome war to continue any longer. He couldn’t afford to be listless right now.

†

“Lord Diablo! I’m so glad you’re safe!”

In the 《Prayer Room of Fire》, located in the deepest part of the Inner Sanctum, the High Priest Lumachina rose from her chair and hurried over to Diablo. That wasn’t something that would normally happen, as she was the highest ranking member of clergy.

Standing in the room were the Paladin Tria and other high ranking priests, but despite Lumachina acting in a manner that went against tradition and social standing, no one blamed her for it.



“And you too, Miss Rem, I’m happy to see you’ve returned!” Lumachina told Rem.

“...I’m only here because Diablo was there to save me.” Rem nodded gently.

“Let me use a healing prayer on you.”

“...There’s no need for that. Diablo’s potion completely healed me,” Rem said, shaking her legs to illustrate.

Her legs were crushed by a Magimatic Sol, leaving her in a gruesome state, but now there wasn’t so much as a scratch on her legs. Her skin was sleek and healthy, and her tight muscles were well-toned. Diablo lowered her down onto the thick carpet.

“You should be healed anyway, just to be on the safe side,” Lumachina insisted.

“...There are people who are in much worse conditions.” Rem shook her head.

“It’s fine, Rem,” Lumachina told her soothingly. “We’re in the Inner Sanctum, the heart of the Church. We have many high ranking priests here, and I’ve been told we have enough healers to go around.”

“Really?”

“There’s something that concerns me. Could you please let me handle this?”

Despite being the highest official in the Church, Lumachina made her request politely and lowered her head. Rem shrunk back modestly, her tail drooping.

“...E-Erm, I’m sorry. Refusing a High Priest’s prayer... That was rude of me.”

“Do not worry about it. We needn’t mind trifling matters like this in such a time of crisis. Will you accept my prayer?”

“I will.”

“Then please lie down, Miss Rem. Close your eyes and relax yourself.”

“...Understood. But, give me just a moment first,” Rem’s black eyes turned to look at Diablo. “Diablo, could you stay by my side?”

“Mm?”

“...I’m sorry. This must sound childish. But when you’re standing away from me, it feels like you might leave... It makes me anxious.”

“Hmph. Such a ridiculous concern. The Empire’s army has retreated and shouldn’t launch another attack so soon. The Magimatic Sols cannot fight for long periods of time.”

“They can’t?”

“Mm. That was how the game mechanics worked... I mean, don’t concern yourself with trifling details! You have your body and your health to worry over. Know that no one may restrain me. I shall be where I wish to be!” he exclaimed with a strong tone.

Rem beamed happily.

“...All right. I’m relieved now.”

“Hmph!” Diablo flapped his cloak with grandiosity and turned, so as to hide the blush on his cheeks. “Lumachina, I leave her in your hands!”

“Yes, Lord Diablo.” Lumachina bowed her head devoutly.

Apparently Lumachina was still under the impression Diablo was God and needed to be worshiped. Even after he clearly and decisively denied it...

†

Diablo left the Prayer Room of Fire alone, when a high-pitched voice reached him from the other side of the corridor.

“Diiiiiiiiiiiiiaaaaaaaaaa...”

“Mm?”

“—blooooooooooooooooooooooooooooo!”

Just as that shout reached his ears, something soft rammed itself against his face.

“Mmmg?!”

He was shoved between two large, soft swellings. At this point, Diablo recognized who this was just by the sensation.

“Diabloooo, it was sooo scaaary!”

“Mmg, nng...!”

“There was this loud noise, like, boooooom, baaaang, and it started shaking, like brrrrrr!”

“Mmmg, nng...”

“Diablo?”

“Fha!” He finally managed to push away the softness bearing down on his face.

I almost choked in there!

“Whoa!” Shera let out a small, sweet screech.

The Elves were typically slender and thin, but despite that, Shera was endowed with a giant pair of breasts that kept shaking and jolting softly. On top of all that, Shera was incredibly beautiful. It wasn't for nothing that Elves were considered the closest race to the Celestials. Despite working alongside her for quite some time now, Diablo couldn't look her in the face without blushing.

But despite that, Shera peeked at his face curiously.

“What's wrong, Diablo? Did something sad happen?”

“Ah... Ugh...”

“Yeah, you're right... A lot of bad and sad things happened today. I'm sorry, I couldn't help you at all...” Shera looked down sadly.

It was like seeing a flower wilt in the span of a second. Shera's bright smile could light up any situation, but that only meant her frown made it feel as if the sun had suddenly gone dark. Diablo extended a hand to place it on her shoulder, but eventually was too shy to actually touch her and simply left it hanging.

“You should smile.”

“Huh?”

“If there's anything you can do to help in this situation, it is to smile.”

“Mm... Like this?” Shera said, managing a crooked, pained smile.

No. Not like that. More, encouragingly...

Diablo felt pathetic. He couldn't even manage to get a single girl to smile — a girl he'd given a wedding ring to, no less. Bringing a smile to a girl's lips was so much more challenging than defeating a Magimatic Sol was.

Silence hung over them... But then an uncharacteristically bright voice sailed between the two of them.

“Oh, hiya, Diablo! Great work out there!”

“You did great, Boss!”

A pair of Grasswalkers tottered over down the hall. One of them was Sylvie, the Grandmaster of Faltra's Adventurer's Guild. The other was Horn, a thief aspiring to become a sorcerer. Both of them looked like little girls, and Horn was, in fact, thirteen years old. Diablo didn't know Sylvie's age, but she was apparently much older.

Grasswalkers were a race that had a rabbit's ears and tail and retained a childish, youthful appearance even upon growing older. Sylvie motioned with her hand for Diablo to come closer, her ears swinging back and forth.

“The Church's people made us food. Potions can heal your wounds and mend your bones, but you can't work or fight on an empty stomach.”

Food, huh...?

“Right, right!” Shera raised both hands to the air. “That sounds tasty! Diablo, let's go eat!”

Eating was indeed necessary. The fighting started in early dawn, and by now it was past noon.

I should eat now, when I still have the time.

“I saw you out there, Boss!” Horn said excitedly, swinging her clenched fists. “You were super strong!”

“Mm?”

“Your magic blasted that red giant from the Empire! I looked out just in time

to see it!”

Diablo fell silent.

“And then you finished that white giant too, and saved Rem! Your magic is the best, Boss! I hope I can use something like that someday too...”

“Kuh...”

Diablo could remember it. The last words he heard coming from within 《Viatanos of the White》...

“Aaah, aaaaaaaaah... Nooo! It’s crushing me! It’s tearing me apart! Save meeee! Migurtha, Migurthaaaa! Airaaaaaaaaa! Somebody, save meeeeeeeeeee!”

“Discard your unit, Rikka!”

“It won’t budge! It won’t open, it won’t... Aaaaaaaaah... Mommy, big sister... Save me... Somebody, please save meeeeeeeeeeeeeee!”

The scream lingered in his ears. Diablo felt something bubble up from the pit of his stomach.

“Ugh...”

If his stomach hadn’t been empty, he’d likely have thrown up. He silently swallowed the bitter, acidic gastric juices that rose up to his mouth and turned his back.

There were people riding it...

Magimatic Sols were manned weapons, and they weren’t monsters or evil villains inside. They were just his enemies. His opponents. That was all.

“Huh?” Horn asked. “Boss, where ya off to? The toilet?”

“Go ahead and eat without me.”

“Huh?! You’re not eating? But you haven’t eaten all morning...!”

But when Horn tried to go after him, she was stopped by — surprisingly enough — Shera.

“Diablo... If you feel hungry, come eat with us, okay?” she said with a sorrowful voice. “I’ll be waiting for you...”

As bad as he felt for what he was putting her through, he couldn't suppress the urge to throw up. The thought of food was the last thing on his mind.

I'm not hungry...

He thought back to those words. The words he'd told his family in the old world when he shut himself off in his room.

†

Diablo walked down the corridor. Normally, Shera would follow behind him without saying a word, but right now there was no one there. She probably realized he wanted to be left alone. Or maybe the air he was giving off was simply that standoffish.

"Kuh..."

As socially inept as he was, he didn't want to spoil the atmosphere for everyone else. If anything, it was exactly that dread of spoiling the mood that made him linger, choose his words all too cautiously and eventually say nothing. And then the guilt would make it hard to breathe, making his head spin all the more, before eventually he succumbed to outright panic...

No, no, no! I'm a Demon Lord now! In this world, I'm the Demon Lord Diablo! I'm a Demon Lord! A Demon Lord, a Demon Lord, a Demon Lord!

He chanted the words in his mind time and again, trying to lift himself up from those depressing thoughts. He felt as if Shera and the others had long since seen through his acting, but that didn't matter.

"Ahahahahaha! I am a Demon Lord! Even if my sour attitude spoils the mood, I don't give a damn! If anything, it's obvious it would! That's how it works! A Demon Lord being nice and friendly makes no sense!"

"Excuse me...?" someone suddenly called out to him from behind.

Aaaah?!

If Diablo could, he'd give himself a pat on the back for not exclaiming out loud. Nothing was more embarrassing than being caught talking to yourself. And so, while blushing profusely on the inside, Diablo made a menacing expression as he turned around.

“Fool! I should hope you’ve prepared yourself for the consequences of beckoning me...?!”

“M-My apologies!”

The first thing Diablo noticed was the blue armor. It was Tria, the Paladin. She was a truly pious woman who worked to save Lumachina when the Cardinal Authority was in control of the Church. She stood still, her back straight like an arrow, and her expression seemed nervous.

“P-Paladin Captain Diablo, I’d like to ask about what you said earlier!”

“Wh-What I said?!” He repeated her inquiry, a bit of a shiver in his voice.

He had to suppress the urge to squirm in place.

C’mon, let a guy talk to himself! Just pretend you didn’t hear that! If I don’t have my Demon Lord role play, I can’t keep my peace of mind intact!

As his internal self was moments away from bursting into frustrated tears, Diablo stiffened in place... But as it turned out, Tria was speaking of something else.

“I mean what you told Miss Rem.”

“Mm?”

“About the Gelmed Empire’s Magimatic Sols. I believe you mentioned something about them... I’d appreciate it if you could tell me in further detail.”

...So she wasn’t talking about how I was talking to myself!

Diablo regained his cool within moments and folded his arms grandly.

“Hmph... State your question. But you would do well not to disappoint me.”

“You said, ‘Magimatic Sols cannot fight for long periods of time.’ Is that true? If so, then we can safely order our troops to step down and rest.”

Oh, I see. Diablo thought to himself.

He had little experience in fighting wars. He’d played simulation games religiously, but had no knowledge of tactics. He never cared for military affairs or politics. Still, he could at least imagine that the Church’s soldiers were on high alert in anticipation of an attack from the Gelmed Empire.

The castle had fallen, after all, and the Empire's army was just across the canal from them before. The bridges connecting to the other sectors were destroyed, but Magimatic Sols were capable of flight. They were understandably wary.

How do I explain it...?

In the smartphone simulation game *Girl's Arms*, each unit had a stat called ET — Energy Time. It gradually depleted as long as the unit was deployed in combat, and using special abilities consumed further ET.

The Gelmed Empire were chasing Rem because she was the 'Girl of the Vessel' or something, and the Church's soldiers and the Empire's knights were clearly exhausted and on their last legs. But despite that, the Magimatic Sols retreated.

Based on that, Diablo concluded that Magimatic Sols were limited by ET in this world as well. But he couldn't say, 'That's how the game mechanics worked, so they probably won't show up again for a while!' And trying to explain it to Tria likely wouldn't convince her. There were too many lives riding on her shoulders.

"Heheheh..." Diablo cackled condescendingly. "Can you not tell when your opponent approaches their limits? They were greatly exhausted and needed rest."

"M-My apologies, Paladin Captain! Your wisdom and experience humble me." Tria bowed her head in awe.

Of course, Diablo couldn't tell how much ET they had left or if they were even using ET to begin with just by fighting them, either. He was bluffing and lying through his teeth.

"Realizing that much just by observing the enemy's movements is to be expected! Have your men rest. The Empire's forces shouldn't move for some time. Though even if they do try to force an attack, I will smite them myself!"

"Thank you very much, Paladin Captain! I will have the soldiers rest and only leave sentries!"

"Mm!"

That was what his usual Demon Lord role play was like, but his own words reminded him. A Magimatic Sol enveloped by flame... Its interior destroyed by his 《Burst Mine》 spell. Tentacles writhing in pain. A charred Human figure... the remains of a girl.

“Ugh...” The urge to vomit rose up in him again.

“Paladin Captain?” Tria asked.

“...It’s nothing. Inform me at once should the enemy strike again.”

“Understood! Paladin Captain, thank you very much. We were in fact quite stumped. The prisoner would not tell us anything.”

Of course not. They probably captured an ordinary infantry soldier, who would know little about how Magimatic Sols worked.

“One of those armors’ pilots might know more about it,” Diablo said.

“Yes, that’s what I think, too... But she keeps her mouth shut.”

“Mm? Wait.” Diablo paused, realizing he’d just heard something strange.

“Huh?” Tria asked in confusion.

Diablo thought back to what she’d just said.

“...Hey. The prisoner’s just an ordinary soldier, right?”

“No, it’s the knight that rode the Magimatic Sol you destroyed, 《Burix of the Red》... Though I’m not sure if ‘knight’ and ‘ride’ are the right words to use here.”

No way!

“You mean... it’s Erina Reufelia?!”

“Ah, yes. I believe that’s who she identified as.” Tria nodded.

I thought I killed her!

But come to think of it, Diablo recalled that most of the pilots in *Girls’ Arms* weren’t human, but rather what one would usually call monster girls. And Erina’s race was...

“She’s a...” Diablo muttered.

“I suppose burning isn’t enough to kill a Vampire,” Tria concluded.

“Where is she?!” Diablo grabbed Tria by the shoulders. “I need to see her, now!”

“Haa?! She’s down at the surface, in a prison camp...”

†

The Inner Sanctum was located in the capital of Sevenwall’s twelfth district — at the heart of the Grand Cathedral. The Inner Sanctum was a hovering structure that floated high above the ground, said to have been built by God himself.

Apparently, it wasn’t that the Inner Sanctum was built in this Human city, but rather the city itself was built around it. The Inner Sanctum was the most holy, hallowed ground of the Church, and only a chosen few were allowed inside.

Diablo descended through the levitating corridor. It was an elevator of sorts, but the circular platform that descended and ascended from the ground to the Inner Sanctum had no walls. If a normal person were to fall into the shaft, they’d likely die. Diablo could use his flight magic to descend, but Tria couldn’t do the same, and so they slowly descended together down to the surface.

“Over here.” Tria guided him to the prison camp. Originally, the building served as an armory, and its stone walls looked quite sturdy. All of the weapons were vacated now, leaving the rooms open to hold prisoners. Standing before the iron door leading to one of the rooms was a pair of priests.

“Oh, Lady Paladin!”

“The prisoner hasn’t spoken yet.”

“That’s fine. The Paladin Captain wishes to see her. Could you let us in?”

“The Paladin Captain...?!”

“This man is the Paladin Captain?! Ah, understood!”

At Tria’s explanation, the priests opened the door. She remained behind in the corridor.

“Now then, Captain... While it may be presumptuous of me to say this, do

keep in mind that Vampires are a race that employ many mysterious powers. Stay on your guard at all times.”

“Mm.” Diablo nodded and entered the prisoner’s room.

Inside, he found a girl fastened to the wall with chains. It was, without a doubt, Erina Reufelia. She wasn’t wearing any clothes, but it wasn’t that she was stripped naked, this was how she rode her Magimatic Sol. She had a modest chest and slender limbs, and her hair and eyes both had an angry red color.

Truth be told, Diablo didn’t know where to look. But a Demon Lord couldn’t be caught being embarrassed by the sight of a nude girl. That would be incredibly lame. Instead, Diablo narrowed his eyes to a squint, as if trying to focus on something from afar. It seemed as if he was glaring at Erina.

“You’re...!” she uttered in surprise, recognizing him.

“Heh... I thought I’d reduced you to ashes. Quite the tenacious one, aren’t you?” he remarked in a Demon Lord-ly manner.

The girl twitched in fear.

“Wh-What do you want, cretin...? Could you stop staring at me all strange like that?!”

Strange?

Diablo placed a hand over his mouth. Contrary to his overbearing tone, his face was seemingly contorted in a smile.

She’s alive...

He knew this did little to change things. The fact he’d killed her friend and tried to kill her... wouldn’t be wiped away by this. Nothing could change what happened.

But the truth was, he never wanted to kill them. Who would enjoy killing people they didn’t even hate?! They were alive!

Diablo’s field of vision clouded over. He’d moved his hands from his lips to cover his eyes.

“...Kuh.”

“Wh-What?”

“You’re... alive... Thank goodness...”



Diablo wiped his eyes while Erina watched him in confusion.

“You were the one who tried to kill me to begin with...”

Diablo said nothing.

“Were you coerced to fight, too?” Erina’s bitter expression, which seemed to hold contempt for the rest of the world, melted away, leaving an expression that befit a girl her age.

“What?!” Diablo exclaimed.

“You’re not...?”

“You were coerced into fighting in this war?!”

“Aah, erm...”

“You may tell me more.”

“Hmm? And if I tell you, will you save me from this place?”

“I might.”

“Ah?!” Erina let out a surprised cry.

Her shock was understandable. Diablo wasn’t joking, though. He got the feeling there were extenuating circumstances to consider here. He’d already gotten that creeping suspicion when he first fought them. This girl, and her friend Rikka who piloted Viatanos of the White, didn’t strike him as villains. If anything, they had the same outlook as Diablo. ‘I don’t want to kill or be killed.’ Diablo didn’t pretend to be some kind of pacifist, but he didn’t want to take a life if he could help it.

His resolve only extended that far.

And so, if the Gelmed Empire really was forcing those girls to fight, Diablo’s intuition made sense.

Erina fell silent. She was hesitating. And after glaring at Diablo for a long moment... She let out a long, despondent sigh.

“...Fine... I don’t care anymore. I’m done for either way...” Apparently she’d resigned herself and began speaking.

“My homeland was occupied by the Gelmed Empire. It was a small Human country, where my clan and I lived in hiding.”

“A Vampire clan?”

“I’m a half-Vampire. Our ancestral Vampires were wiped out, and their minions fled from Hunters to seek refuge in that country... Though that happened centuries ago.”

“Mm.”

“My comrades, who pilot the other Magimatic Sols, all come from similar backgrounds. Lady Aira, Lady Migurtha, Bakki, Saya, Toaha, Rikka...”

The mention of Rikka’s name sent a pang of pain through Diablo’s heart, but he couldn’t have afforded to spare her. He did it to save Rem, and didn’t regret what he did. He didn’t have the presence of mind to worry over the enemy’s well-being given the situation, but now that he knew that they were being compelled into fighting this war, the regret grew deeper. Would she have been saved if he could have simply handled the situation better? Would he have had another choice?

But while his regret weighed down on him, his anger toward the Gelmed Empire was just as intense.

“So they took your families hostage to force you all to fight?”

“Yes...”

“I don’t understand. I’m sure there’s plenty of soldiers who’d gladly pilot a Magimatic Sol and fight on the battlefield. Why would they go so far as to take hostages specifically to force you?”

Diablo couldn’t imagine Erina being an exemplary soldier.

“Aaaah?!” Erina seemed outraged by his implication. “As unwilling as I am to fight, I’ll have you know I’ve remained undefeated across many battlefields...!”

“You won not on the merit of your own strength,” Diablo chided her gravely. “Do not forget those victories are owed to the Magimatic Sol’s performance.”

“I-I know that!”

“Then why?”

“...Only compatible people may control a Magimatic Sol.”

“Compatible people...?”

Was there something about that in *Girls' Arms'* story? Diablo only played it for a short while, so he didn't remember the background story that deeply.

Was it the “Chosen Pilots”...?

Diablo did remember something that seemed to fit the bill, but...

“Whoever is placed within a Magimatic Sol has their heart read by its interior.”

“Go on.”

“And if that reading does not satisfy the Magimatic Sol...”

“Mm?”

The chains clinked. Looking down, Diablo found the iron shackles binding Erina's limbs had the holy mark etched onto them. Erina clenched her teeth, and then spat out the rest.

“Those who are found incompatible... are devoured by the Magimatic Sol.”

“Wh-What?!”

“And so the Empire's army took our families hostage, placed enslavement spells on us, and threw us into Magimatic Sols... I know not how many people were tested, but... There's no doubting that at least an entire town's worth of people was likely consumed by those tests...” Crimson droplets rolled down Erina's cheeks. Such was the color of a Vampire's tears.

Diablo was speechless. He'd once imagined something — he'd appeared in this world in the form of his game character from *Cross Reverie*, but might there have been a chance he'd have appeared in the world of *Girls' Arms*? And if so, would he have been these girls' commander?

That's absurd... They use experiments that might... no, that likely will kill their subjects, just to pick pilots?! And they take hostages to force them to do it?

“Unforgivable...!” Diablo clenched his fist angrily.

“Hii?!” Erina flinched in fear.

Diablo inadvertently allowed his magical energy to leak out again. That tended to happen when he lost his temper. Diablo took a deep breath to calm himself.

“...I’ll at least have them prepare you some clothes.”

He sympathized with Erina and her comrades, but the Church’s soldiers lost friends and families in the latest battle. They wouldn’t pardon an enemy soldier so easily, but he could at least give her some humane treatment.

“I don’t need any clothes.”

“What?”

“How I’m treated doesn’t matter, but I want to request something of you.”

“...Request something of me...?”

“Please, save Lady Aira and the others. That’s all I ask for. None of them wish to fight.”

“You ask me to save them, but...”

“The master of our enslavement spells and the one commanding the scouts holding our families hostage are one and the same — the commander of the invasion army! A man called Doriadanph! He’s a powerful Magimatic mage in the Gelmed Empire! If you can defeat him, just that one man...!”

Her request was easier said than done. Defeating an enemy army’s commander could overturn the tides of battle. That much was obvious, which meant the Empire would keep him well-guarded, so reaching him would be a challenging task.

What’s worse, Aira and the other pilots were currently on the enemy’s side. Magimatic Sols were individually powerful, and Diablo couldn’t hope to hold back if he aimed to defeat one. Not to mention the fact that, logically speaking, he had no reason to accept. However, his gamer’s instincts were steering him the other way.

The more challenging a quest is, the better!

“Ahahahaha!” Diablo laughed with bravado as he flapped his cloak. “You petition a Demon Lord for help? You are a curious one! But any who enact such inane cruelty before my eyes will be met with a death most painful! I shall teach that fool Doriadanph the terror of facing the one true Demon Lord!”

He spoke the emotions in his heart, punctuating them with his Demon Lord-ly attitude. Erina gulped... and then her eyes grew moist again. Red tears streaked down her cheeks one after another.

“Uuu... Aaaah... Aaaaaaah! Whaaaaaaaaaaaaa!” She broke into sobs.

The room’s door swung open loudly.

“Paladin Captain?!” Tria called out.

“Huh?! Oh, no... This is...”

“Aaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaah! Y-You’ll... defeat... h-him... You’ll... save Lady... Aira... Aaaaaaah!”

He was standing in front of a sobbing, howling naked girl with the wicked smile of a villain on his lips. Tria looked at him with conflicted eyes.

“E-Erm... Lady Lumachina has decreed that we are not to abuse any prisoners. So if you could, despite your station, abstain from torture...”

I, uh, I wasn’t torturing anyone!

But making excuses wouldn’t be the Demon Lord-ly thing to...

Diablo walked out into the corridor.

“Hmph! I’ve no more use for her. She gave me the information I wanted, so do what you will with her,” he said, and then turned to the priests. “Also, prepare her some clothes. She may be an enemy soldier and a Vampire, but she is still of the races. Or do you intend to oppose the High Priest’s wishes?!”

“By your order!”

Diablo was confident they would handle this matter well. Diablo then left the prison camp.

Interlude

The fire has gone out, Klem thought to herself.

She walked down the main street of the frontier city of Faltra, located in Lyferia's western regions. Normally, the roads were bustling with people, so much so that it was hard to make your way through the crowd. But despite it being the middle of the day, the streets were as empty as if it were midnight.

"...What a bother."

Klem was heading to her favorite restaurant in the northern sector, only to be met with a sign saying the place was temporarily closed. The owner probably fled the city, as Faltra's citizens were all leaving.

Klem began making her way back to the 《Peace of Mind Inn》, and along the way, passed by the city gate.

The northern gate was recently rebuilt, and now a long column of carriages was lined up before it. The sound of wheels grinding against gravel reached her ears.

"Hmph..."

"Oh, is that you, Klem, meow?"

"Mm?"

Turning to face the voice, Klem's gaze fell on Mei, the Peace of Mind Inn's poster girl. She was a Pantherian girl who was looking after Klem and Edelgard. Having fought to defend the city from the Demon Overlord Modinaram, Klem had earned the townsfolk's trust. And so, despite Klem being a Demon Lord herself, Mei treated her as a friend.

"Where were you off to, meow?"

"Appetissant."

"Wow, that expensive restaurant in the northern district? I hear their lunches are famous!"

“Well... Except they were closed.”

“Oh, meow.” Mei placed a hand on her cheek in a bothered gesture.

“Where are they even running off to...?” Klem whispered to herself.

To the west was the Demon Lord’s Domain. It was part of Lyferia’s territory for a time, but when the Demon Overlord Modinaram marched his armies on Faltra, most of the Human strongholds there fell.

“Ahaha, meow...” Mei gave a forced smile and cocked her head. “They say the king died in battle. Rumor has it that if the Gelmed Empire marches west, Faltra will get caught up in the war.”

“Of course it will. And if Faltra falls, it’s only a matter of time before the nearby cities fall as well. The Fallen might not pay small villages any mind, but the races have a way of being thorough.”

The Gelmed Empire would seek out those villages and make use of any method possible to achieve their goal. They would round people up for labor, conscript them, or use them as material for Human experimentation...

Klem didn’t think this kingdom was a utopia by any means, but the way it was until now was better than the prospect of it being occupied by Gelmed. Klem peered at Mei, who was walking beside her.

Would I have been better off destroying this town? It would at least have spared them from a fate worse than death.

Mei beamed at Klem, unaware of the thoughts going through her mind.

“Klem, you know the Gelmed Empire?”

“I am a Demon Lord, after all.”

With the fragments of her soul that remained within Rem now returned to her, Klem’s memory was fully restored. She knew almost everything about this world, and many things about what existed outside this world, too.

Currently, there was no doubt that Klem was the complete, invincible Demon Lord Krebskulm, but something had changed about her. She’d grown fond of her life in Faltra. She loved the taste of biscuits, found the smiles of the people pleasant, and liked spending her time in the open-air café on the main street.

And she loved chocolate, too.

Those were all emotions that exceeded her destructive impulses as a Demon Lord.

“The meals you serve aren’t bad, you know,” Klem told Mei.

“Hehe... Thank you, meow☆ If you haven’t had lunch, how about I fix you a little something to eat?”

“Mm!” Klem nodded, becoming cheerful at the offer. “Aren’t you going to run, though? I predict that within a month the Gelmed Empire will attack this place.”

Even Diablo wouldn’t be able to stop the Empire’s invasion. He’d likely take his comrades and flee to the Kingdom of Greenwood, or his personal fortress. Mei’s expression became somewhat troubled, though.

“Ahaha, meow... I’m scared, but I have my customers to consider.”

“What?”

“Like you and Edelgard. And I told Diablo he could always come back here. So for as long as I have customers, I have to protect the inn. It’s called the ‘Peace of Mind’ Inn because our customers can always be sure they have a place to come back to.” She finished her explanation with a strained smile.

She’s staying behind for her customers...? Klem felt an unusual emotion bubble up in her chest.

And while this was the first time she’d experienced anguish, Klem didn’t find it entirely disagreeable.

“...You’re doing it for this Demon Lord, you say?”

“Oh, but I’m sure Faltra will be fine! Our governor is really strong!”

“A strong governor? Oh, that man, Galford... Well, he’s quite high-leveled for one of the races, but he’s not much of a hero.”

If he was overwhelmed by the Demon Overlord, he would stand no chance against the Gelmed Empire’s Magimatic Sols.

“Meow...?” Mei scratched her cheek in confusion. “Klem, you know a hero?”

“I did fight one in my past life. I wouldn’t lose to one in a one-on-one fight, though.”

Individually, those of the races had their limits, and that was why Klem didn’t believe Diablo could stop the Gelmed Empire. He was overwhelmingly powerful, but he always fought alone, and the only one of his subordinates that was truly powerful was the Swordmaster Sasara.

And when Diablo loses, the Kingdom of Lyferia will fall apart, and the flames of war would encroach on Faltra.

And when they do, this girl will...

“Hmhm. It seems this Demon Lord finds that possibility unacceptable...”

“Meow?”

It was strange, truth be told. Those of the Fallen find pleasure in seeing the races die, and yet...

“Remain in Faltra,” Klem told Mei. “You will be safe here.”

“Huh?”

“But this Demon Lord will now embark on a journey.”

“Are you saying you’re...?” Mei’s expression clouded over with sorrow.

“Nay! I am not fleeing. I, Krebskulm, am the strongest of all Demon Lords! The races will never strike fear into me. But if this town becomes a battlefield, I will have nothing left to defend.”

“D-Defend...?”

Klem looked at Mei, whose expression was perplexed. The girl had grown emaciated.

“Those of the Gelmed Empire are members of the races, too, after all. But you won’t ask that this Demon Lord protects their lives, too, will you?”

“Ah, yes, of course not!”

“Mm, then leave it to me! You can make me lunch when I come back.”

“I-I’ll wait for you!” Mei nodded, her eyes moist with tears. “When you come

back, Klem, I'll make you an amaaaaazing lunch! And I'll give you so many biscuits you won't have room for them all!"

Klem's lips softened to a smile.

"You would do well to prepare much for me!"

†

Klem walked down the street alone. She could have gone to the east gate, but decided to go to the southern gate first. She approached the bakery 《Petre's》. This was another popular store that on a standard day would have a large number of people lined up, but it was deserted now. The fact that they were still open for business was praiseworthy enough.

As Klem opened the door, a bell rang out. The store's manager, a Grasswalker who looked like a little boy, greeted her.

"Welcome to Petre's! Thank you for coming! We've got biscuits and bread. What'll you have?"

"I'm not a customer," Klem said curtly.

"Gaaaah..." The manager let out a depressed sigh. "Really...? Well, what can I do for you, little not-customer?"

There were more workers in the store than customers. One of those workers — Edelgard — hurried over to Klem's side.

"Demon Lord!"

"Mm."

"Is something the... matter? Matter!"

For how long they'd stayed in this city, Edelgard still hadn't mastered speaking in their tongue. At this point, it was hard to tell if she simply wasn't suited for it or was just doing it on purpose. And that was despite her being a Fallen with an appearance and form close to a Human's...

"We leave for the capital," Klem announced.

Apparently that alone was enough for Edelgard to understand everything, because she got down on one knee.

“Please, allow Edelgard to... escort? Escort! You!”

“Very well.”

“You are, too kind!” Edelgard bowed her head deeply.

Petre, the manager, was looking between the two of them with panicked confusion. Edelgard got to her feet and lowered her head respectfully toward him as she spoke.

“Manager! For a while, can’t come to work!”

“Huuuuh?!”

“Is it, problem?”

“Well...! Ah, erm... Well, I guess we’re not getting any customers anyway... I guess it’s fine...?” He agreed in a somewhat heartbroken fashion.

“Thank you for, everything, so far!”

“Take care of yourself. Oh, about your salary... Do you want to get paid for all this week’s days?”

“...Edelgard rather, have... as many biscuits, as possible? Possible!”

“Huh? Well, sure, I don’t mind.”

Edelgard took a basket full of biscuits. She then said her goodbyes to her coworkers and the few regular customers that were in the restaurant. One gangly Pantherian man spoke up, “Oh, so you’re finally setting sail for greener pastures, huh...? It’ll be lonely around here.”

Setting sail?

“Will you be coming back once you’re done with your business?”

“Hmm...” Edelgard turned her gaze to Klem.

“Of course!” She nodded. “Without this store’s biscuits, there’s no point in keeping the races alive!”

“Huuuh?!” Petre blushed and swayed in place. “Ehehe... It’s embarrassing when you put it like that. I’ll work hard to keep the store open, so do come back!”

Edelgard smiled.

“Will come back! Won’t? Will!”

†

With Edelgard in tow, Klem left Faltra through the eastern gate. It was their first time in a long while being outside the city, and while there were many sentries along the eastern gate, no one faulted them for leaving. The people entering the town were subjected to strict investigation, but those leaving were simply checked to see they weren’t on the wanted list.

Even if they were stopped, the two of them would have simply forced their way through, of course...

They walked down the road to the capital while nibbling on biscuits.

“One more...”

“Yes, Demon Lord!”

“Oh, actually, I take that back.”

“Mm?”

“If I eat too many now, they’ll run out faster. Biscuits are delicious, but they have a critical flaw. They run out when you eat them.”

“Yes.”

Someone suddenly appeared from behind a tree — a man with extremely flashy, golden armor. He waved his hand at them in a friendly gesture.

“Hello there, you two.”

“Mm?” Klem regarded him suspiciously, and Edelgard stepped in front of her defensively.

“You are...” she said.

“Hmm! I am Emile Bichelberger! Ally to all women, and ally to allies of women!” The man introduced himself, raising his helmet’s face guard.

He was a nice guy who had blond hair, blue eyes, and a strongish face.

“What do you want?” Klem asked.

“I’ve heard of you two heading for the capital to fight the Gelmed Empire, little Klem. Allow me to lend you my strength!”

“Oh?”

“Protecting women is my duty!”

Klem crossed her arms in contemplation.

“In that case, protect the women of Faltra. This Demon Lord does not need protection.”

“Ugh... No, but...”

“Besides, you can’t come with us. Edelgard, call for it.”

“Yes, Demon Lord.”

Edelgard wielded a lance in combat, but her class wasn’t ‘Lancer.’ She stuck her fingers in her mouth and whistled. In response, something began rushing in their direction, kicking up a cloud of dust in its wake.

“What is that?!” Emile raised his voice in surprise.

Before he could even finish his sentence, however, the creature ran between them — an Earth Dragon. Edelgard mounted its back with a hop. Her class was Dragon Knight, after all. Klem took a seat behind her.

“Her mount is capable of running for three days and nights without stopping for rest. I doubt you can keep up with it.”

“Aaah...” Emile winced.

“Sorry, but...” Edelgard said with a flat tone. “This one is, two-seats? Two-seater!”

“Stay here and protect Faltra. The palace has probably fallen already. The people of the races will likely soon wash over this place, having been reduced to savage fiends.”

“Aah... Yes, rumor has it that the defeated soldiers and refugees have become bandits and thieves.”

“Can I leave this place in your care?” Klem asked from atop the Earth Dragon.

Emile drew his sword and held it before his heart, its tip aimed at the heavens.

“As substitute guildmaster of the Adventurer’s Guild, I, Emile Bichelberger, swear to protect all of Faltra’s women!” he exclaimed.

Klem nodded, and then ordered Edelgard, “Let’s go.”

“Under...stood!” Edelgard replied and clicked her heels against the Earth Dragon’s sides as she gripped its thorny reins.

The Earth Dragon’s thick hind legs kicked against the ground, and it took off in an explosive sprint, kicking up the earth behind it. With flight-like speed, the Earth Dragon sprinted down the highway.

It was a shaky ride, and the scenery sailed past them with dizzying speed. The wind whistled shrilly in their ears. Thankfully, Klem — and of course Edelgard as well — had the Rider ability, and weren’t strained by the ride at all.

“Demon Lord... You protect, races again?”

“I care little for a conflict between the races, but that one is too dangerous for this Demon Lord to ignore.”

“Emperor...”

“That one is a serpent who would devour the earth. As he is now, he could even be more troublesome than the Demon Overlord, in a way.”

“...But he, is of the races...”

“The races are weak, but they are capable of growth. They can mature faster than other species, stronger, without limit, and by any means. Even if it means discarding their bodies.”

Klem coiled her arms around Edelgard’s slender waist, and Edelgard’s cheeks flushed. Just by touching the Fallen, a Demon Lord sent mana into its servants.

“Nng...” Edelgard breathed out.

“But we do not have enough pawns at hand yet.”

“Pawn... Edelgard, strong pawn. Won’t lose? Won’t lose!”

“Even still. We need more.”

Chapter 2: Becoming Determined

Dawn was approaching, but despite being rather fatigued, Diablo couldn't fall asleep. He'd seen too much death. Lying down in his room only made his nerves more strained.

There's already light outside...

In this world, curtains and glass windows were items of luxury. The Inner Sanctum was being repaired and maintained from the believers' donations, but most of it was built frugally. And so, the windows were mostly closed off with planks if they needed to be closed. Light streamed in from the gap between the boards.

"...Morning already."

In his old world, Diablo would often stay up all night gaming, only going to sleep once the sky started getting bright.

Diablo's thoughts were disturbed by a knock on the door.

"Mm? Who is it?" he asked in his Demon Lord-ly voice.

"Good morning, Lord Diablo. It's me, Lumachina."

What was the High Priest herself doing here alone this early in the morning? Diablo thought it unusual, but then again, he was technically the Paladin Captain. This probably wasn't all that surprising.

"Come in, I permit it."

But as soon as Diablo said it, he realized he was naked from the waist up. Sevenwall had a warm climate, so the women often slept in thin gowns and the men slept half-naked. Lumachina, of course, didn't enter the room in a nightgown. She was clad in a holy woman's outfit, and looked as if she'd just stepped out of a painting.

"Pardon me for approaching you so early, Lord Diablo."

"I don't mind. What is it?" Diablo said, getting to his feet.

He opened the window and let some fresh air into the room. Lumachina strode up beside him. The window offered a view of the streets where, despite it being a time of war, the Church's believers were already diligently moving about the streets. Breakfasts were being prepared, weapons were being serviced, and places were even being cleaned.

Diablo moved his gaze further away. On the other side of the river was Castle Grandiose, which was currently occupied by the Gelmed Imperial Army. Lumachina fixed her gaze on the castle as well.

"Scouts report the Empire has moved their main force into the castle," she said.

"I imagined as much."

"We've assumed they might attack at dawn, but there are no signs of any movements from their side yet."

"Mm."

Was it taking them that long to recover, or were they waiting for something? Diablo couldn't tell. Maybe if he was into war stories or played more war simulation games, or perhaps if he was obsessed with some master strategist like Zhuge Liang, he'd be able to promptly come up with the answer.

But sadly, Diablo was the ultimate solo player instead. His expertise was in defeating the enemies lined up before him, and he wasn't any good when it came to moving soldiers or predicting what an enemy army might do. He couldn't even lead a six man party, much less an army.

There were, however, things he knew.

"I'd imagine the enemy army's commander is sitting on the throne and thinking himself king of the castle," Diablo said.

"You think so, Lord Diablo?"

"That's what people in power are like."

"To act in such a manner after so many have perished..." Lumachina muttered, seemingly unable to fully believe it.

Diablo was convinced of it, though.

Anyone who'd lead an army into the enemy castle would definitely be sitting on the throne! Doing it would feel awesome, after all. And since he's the kind of scum who'd take hostages, place enslavement magic on people, and force those girls to fight for him, he'd definitely do something like that.

Lumachina changed the subject. Apparently, that wasn't the reason for her visit.

"...Alicia didn't come back from the battle yesterday."

"What?"

"I thought she might have been injured, so I checked all the first aid tents... As well as the morgues."

Diablo felt a cold chill rush down his spine. He'd heard Alicia went out to fight, and had challenged a Magimatic Sol to battle in order to let Rem escape.

"I cannot imagine she died so easily," Diablo said.

He wanted to believe that.

"I agree." Lumachina nodded. "But there was another report that a person fitting Alicia's description was taken captive by the Empire."

Diablo clicked his tongue in frustration.

She was taken prisoner...

Alicia was an Imperial Knight, and was dressed differently from the other people fighting. The enemy likely assumed that she had more value as a prisoner compared to the other soldiers.

"Hmph... If she isn't dead, we need only take her back."

"Yes." Lumachina nodded.

But her face then turned even more severe. Apparently, this wasn't all she came here for. She hung her head and began speaking.

"And it seems that some kind of curse has been placed on Miss Rem."

"What?!" Diablo exclaimed, his voice coming out more aggressive than he'd intended.

Lumachina's bodyguards flinched and stood at the ready. Lumachina raised a hand to calm them.

"...It is likely a curse that constantly traces her position. It does nothing to harm her. But its effect being so faint serves to make it that much harder to dispel."

"You can't manage it?"

"It will take time. Otherwise, the caster would have to lift the curse themselves."

"Or I defeat them first."

"...Yes."

Diablo deliberated over what he should do.

"There's something I've realized — the Empire is not capable of employing teleportation magic, yes?"

"Ah. Right, they likely don't."

If they could teleport at will, they'd have reached the capital long ago. Especially since they knew where Rem was right now.

"And one more thing. The reason they're not hurrying to attack us is because of the curse."

"Oh..."

"A Magimatic Sol can move faster than a horse. They likely think that even if they take their time, Rem wouldn't be able to escape."

Diablo noted to himself that *Girls' Arms* had nothing in the way of teleportation. It then occurred to him that since the 《Teleportation》 spell didn't exist in that game, the Gelmed Empire was unaware of its existence — and thus weren't wary of it.

"This might be useful information."

"What do you mean, Lord Diablo?"

"No..."

He still needed to think this through carefully. Dying in this world meant real, actual death — there were no respawns or second chances. There was no trying it out and relying on return by death if he failed.

The Paladin Tria entered Diablo's room and kneeled before Lumachina.

"It is time, High Priest."

"I'll be right over."

Time for what?

Perhaps sensing Diablo's question, Lumachina leaned her head in and whispered.

"Funerals for those who had passed on yesterday, and prayers for good fortune and martial success for those still alive."

"Oh. Hmm..." Diablo uttered, and then asked Lumachina, who had bowed her head "...How many died?"

She cast down her gaze.

"Not everyone is accounted for yet, but roughly three thousand of the Church's people," Tria answered in Lumachina's stead. "The kingdom's army reports they've lost anywhere between five to ten thousand men, and there's no counting how many civilians perished. We can only hope those that have fled the capital have made their way to safety."

Diablo was speechless. So many people.

"May the souls of the deceased find their way to paradise..." Lumachina said, her eyes glistening with tears. "All I can do, however, is merely pray..."

"M-Mm..." Diablo uttered.

"If you are leaving, Lord Diablo, do stay safe."

"Have no fear. No one can threaten me."

Tria motioned for Lumachina to go, and the two left Diablo's room. Even if the High Priest herself were to pray for him, the 《Demon Lord's Ring》 would reflect it. But even knowing that, some part of Diablo wished he could indulge in God's protection today.

His feelings were slowly solidifying.

†

If this war didn't end, countless people would go on to die again. And those girls — forced to do battle against their will — would have to fight again. Diablo had to stop it.

After Lumachina left, Diablo glared out the window, his gaze fixed on Castle Grandiose. There was one man and one man only he had to defeat.

"The Commander of the Invasion army... Doriadanph."

Diablo took out 《Tenma's Staff》 from his pouch.

"...Are you thinking of going there on your own?" a voice called out behind him.

It was Rem. She'd entered the room at some point. She might have even heard his exchange with Lumachina.

"What do you mean?"

"...I can tell, Diablo. How long do you think we've spent together? I can guess what you're thinking."

As inappropriate as it was given the situation, Rem's words made his heart flutter with an embarrassing, slightly ticklish sort of emotion.

"Hmph!" He hardened his expression, which very nearly crumbled into a light smile.

"...I'm coming with you."

"Fool. You're the one the enemy is after."

"...In that case, the safest place I could be is at your side. You would never lose to anyone, after all."

"Err, uhm... No, I, well, I have no intention of losing of course, but..."

"And I believe I've become skilled enough to not be a burden."

Should I take Rem along? Would she be safer if I left her with Sylvie, like yesterday?

The Empire was now constantly aware of Rem's position, and they were apparently very much obsessed with her. What if they sent all their Magimatic Sols to attack the Inner Sanctum? How well would Diablo be able to protect her given this situation? And what's more, despite being a considerably high level adventurer, Rem couldn't successfully shake them off last time.

"I could teleport you alone to Faltra..." Diablo began speaking.

"You're telling me to run away on my own?!" Rem said, her eyes widening in anger.

"Nng," Diablo was taken aback.

It might have been the first time he'd ever seen her direct so much anger toward him. He feigned composure, but he was actually quite panicked on the inside.

"...Can you really say for certain the Empire can't use teleportation?" Rem then said, her expression wavering.

"What?"

"...If I'm the one they're after, they could be waiting for me to get away so they can have a chance to swoop in and abduct me."

"You're saying it's a trap?"

That was plausible. While they were currently quite backed into a corridor, the Church's troops were a considerable force, and Diablo did destroy two Magimatic Sols. He didn't know how many more units they had left, but it couldn't have been many.

What if they really were waiting for Rem to move somewhere else — away from Diablo — for a chance to teleport to her position and kidnap her? Diablo had no means of communicating with her, after all. She could be taken away at some point when he wasn't there to protect her and he'd be none the wiser.

"...To begin with, I became an adventurer to defeat the Demon Lord sealed within me," Rem said, holding a hand in front of her chest.

"Right."

"If the Empire is after me, it's in my nature to fight and oppose them, not

run.”

“Even if it means death, or a fate even worse than that?”

“...I am a summoner. I’ll believe in the one I summoned, Diablo. I’ll believe in you.”

“You’re quite the odd one to put your faith in a Demon Lord,” Diablo said, and this time he couldn’t suppress the blush on his cheeks. He turned away so as to not be seen.

“And besides...” Rem carried on. “I want to save Alicia and bring her back.”

Evidently, Lumachina had already told her.

“It seems she was taken captive.”

“...Alicia fought 《Violanos of the Purple》 to let me escape.”

“She’s changed, that one.”

Once before, Alicia had tried to sacrifice Rem.

“...She told me to run. And yesterday, I wasn’t prepared to fight the Magimatic Sols, so I had no choice but to listen.”

“Mm.”

“...When Alicia intended to kill herself, I felt that I wanted to protect her. But she didn’t believe her betrayal could be forgiven.”

“She did say that.”

Once her plots were exposed, Alicia tried to end her life. Diablo forbade her from doing so, and Rem said she wanted to forgive her.

“...Had Alicia died back then, I might not be alive right now.”

“True. I’d only made it to you in time thanks to her.”

“...And that’s why the only thing left now is my friendship with Alicia. The two of us, we shook hands.”

When they set out from Faltra, Alicia and Rem exchanged a firm handshake. Diablo could faintly remember that, but he didn’t quite commit it to memory. Maybe it was because Diablo felt they spoke of friendship like that in the spur

of the moment? But it seemed that, if nothing else, those words weren't just a superficial lie to Rem.

"...I want to save Alicia, Diablo. Could you help me?"

She said those words, knowing she was very much putting her life on the line.

"You never change, do you...?" Diablo heaved a sigh. "You seek to save another when you're the one being pursued."

"...I'm not that good of a person. The ones pursuing me are the same Empire that took Alicia captive. It just happens to be the same opponent."

"Hmph..." Diablo scoffed.

It wasn't that simple. He had to defeat the enemy commander while defending Rem in the process and also rescuing Alicia. If this was a quest in the game, Diablo would be clamoring for a balance fix right about now.

"...I did think this through, though. Violanos of the Purple didn't use its weapons against me yesterday. It seems, for whatever reason, they want to capture the Girl of the Vessel... Or rather, me, alive."

"So it seems."

The old man that appeared in the sky did say that the Girl of the Vessel was 'before his eyes.' That old man was likely the Emperor of the Gelmed Empire. Viatanos of the White also crushed Rem's legs, but it didn't kill her. With all of that, it seemed fairly clear the Empire aimed to capture Rem alive.

"And I'd much rather choose death of my own accord than be captured by them," Rem said, turning her fingertips toward her own neck.

"I shan't allow it!" Diablo shook his head.

"But..."

"If that is your resolve, I will not take you along! You must promise to return unharmed."

Rem's cheeks flushed red.

"...Uuu... Y-You hold me so dearly, Diablo?"

"Ah, no..."

He couldn't deny it. He'd only said it as part of his Demon Lord role play, but he ended up mouthing a pretty embarrassing line.

What the hell? Am I some kind of normie?! Guess I really should explode and die, huh?!

"Understood," Rem said, blushing profusely. "I promise to return safe and sound. So you must promise me the same thing, Diablo."

"Mm...?"

"We both have to come back safe. Together."

"Hmph... Of course."

Rem whispered his name and looked up at him with moist eyes. It was the same expression she had back then. Which clearly meant she was expecting him to...

"...Diablo... Please, give me courage."

With the sound of fabric sliding against skin, Rem's nightgown slid down to the floor. She stood before him, unclothed, undressed... And while it wasn't the first time he'd seen her like this, it always unnerved Diablo's heart.

"Aaah, erm, aaah..."

Diablo was unable to keep up his acting, and could only let out odd exclamations and squeaks. As she implored him, he bent forward, bringing his lips to hers— When suddenly the sound of a wooden plate and a piece of bread hitting the floor rang out loudly in the room. Diablo hurriedly turned to look.

"...?!"

Standing at the entrance of the room with her eyes wide was...

"Shera..." Rem gulped.

†

Diablo stiffened and Rem swung her hands about erratically.

"E-Erm, Shera! This isn't me, erm, acting behind your back or anything, right...?! J-J-Just calm down and listen to me...!"

That said, there wasn't much — or rather, *any* room for misunderstanding. She did very much make a move on Diablo behind Shera's back. They were both Diablo's wives, with Shera's approval, so this wasn't technically forbidden or wrong, but Diablo felt a cold sweat wash over him nonetheless.

Shera hurried over to the two of them, and said...

"Aaah, you two are getting along! Diablo, if you're giving Rem a kiss, that means you have to kiss me too, okay?!"

""...Huh?!"" The two of them replied in unison.

At that reaction, Shera looked between them anxiously.

"Wait, what? Are you saying you don't want to do this with me...?"

"N-No... I-I've made no such statement!" Halfway through the sentence, Diablo finally managed to regain his bearings and return to his Demon Lord role play.

"...You're all right with this, Shera?" Rem asked.

"All right with what?"

"...I have mixed feelings about having to say this myself, but I... I made an advance on Diablo without telling you. Doesn't it make you angry?"

"Oh, that? That's fine. But I'd feel bad if he'd kiss you but not me," Shera said with a bubbly laughter.

Rem exhaled in relief, "I swear, Shera, you're so..."

Her cat ears drooped, as did her shoulders and tail. She was seemingly quite exhausted.

"Hehehe... I want to get along lots with Diablo, but I'm glad when you get along with him, too!"

Rem seemed to flinch somewhat at that comment.

"And if Diablo could get along with me too, that'd make me even happier!"

"You're amazing, Shera," Diablo said.

At this point, he could only be honestly impressed by this girl.

“...Forgive me, Shera. I was moments away from making a terrible mistake.”

“Huh?”

“...I wanted to be alone with Diablo, but... I’ve realized something. I won’t be happy if you’re not there with us too, Shera.”

“Aww, Rem...”

“...Now that I know how much you care about me, I don’t want us to be apart anymore. Can you believe me, after all this time?”

“Yep!”

“...You forgive me?”

“Of course! Let’s kiss together, then!”

“...Y-Yes...”

The two of them seemed to have come to a conclusion, but what kind of conclusion was that? ‘Let’s kiss together’? Rem and Shera drew on Diablo from both sides. Shera had taken off her own nightgown for whatever reason as well, standing as nude as Rem was. Well, with the exception of their 《Enslavement Collars》...

“Aaah...” Diablo could only manage that measly utterance.

“Diablo! Kiss me, too!” Shera said with a grin.

When she approached him with a smile like that, he couldn’t say no. Rem, by contrast, was blushing profusely.

“...Nng... Doing this together is embarrassing on a whole different level...”

Diablo was beyond embarrassed, too. His thoughts had completely frozen over.

What... am I supposed to do...?

Two pairs of lips drew on him.

“Mmhaaa!”

Shera’s kiss was passionate and ardent.

“Mm, mm, mm...”

Rem, by contrast, gave him several reserved, small pecks.

“Mmgh...” Diablo stiffened in place.

He couldn't come up with anything tasteful to say, to say nothing of kissing them back. But something in his mind screamed at him that becoming visibly embarrassed would be worse than death, and so they continued their awkward, three-way kiss.

If everything would end with this, it really would be a joyful moment, but...

Shera then pulled her lips away from Diablo.

“Rem, we should get along, too!” she said.

“Huh? A-All right... I'd love to,” Rem stammered.

Shera held Rem's cheeks tightly with both hands, and suddenly inched her face closer to Rem's. Rem stiffened, and Shera's lips locked on hers without any mercy or hesitation.

“Mmmmhaaaaaa!”

“Nnng?!”

“Mha, nhaaa, aaah.”

“Mmmmf?! Nnnngh?!”

Wet sounds filled the room as a pair of tongues writhed against one another. Shera was earnestly, deeply kissing Rem. By the time the two separated, Rem's cheeks were red and she appeared drained of strength. The kiss melted her to mush to the point where standing on both legs was a struggle. As her legs gave way, Shera caught her in her arms.

“H-Huh? Rem? Did you fall asleep? Are you tired?”

“...Nnng...” Rem gurgled out as she crumbled onto the carpet.

She kissed her into submission?!

Shera then swiftly turned to face Diablo.

“Okay, it's your turn next, Diablo!”

“Aaah...”

“You don’t want to?”

“I-I, erm, that is not what I am saying... H-However, what meaning is there in doing this...?” Diablo stuttered.

“It makes me happy!” Such was Shera’s frank reasoning.

Diablo had no reason to refuse, but he couldn’t get used to this after just once or twice, which meant he simply remained stiff and frozen in place. Shera pounced on him gently and coiled her arms around his neck, and soon his lips were on hers.

“Mmmhaa!”

A sweet jolt whited out Diablo’s mind. It didn’t feel real to him.

Do I really deserve this...?

The feeling of her lips pecking his was ticklish.

Huh? Wait, this is kind of different from the kissing I know? And it’s different from how she kissed me earlier...

“Hehehe... Solami taught me a few tricks!”

What nonsense did that nympho cat woman put into her head?!

Shera’s tongue invaded Diablo’s mouth with animalistic aggressiveness, coiled around Diablo’s own and brushed against the interior of his upper jaw.

Ah, is she using the Glow?!

An odd numbness coursed through his brain, extending across his body. This explained how she reduced Rem into a motionless mess. And Diablo, who had led a long life of abstinence, was even less capable of resisting this. This was effectively a surprise attack on him. With his brain stimulated, sparks popped in his field of vision.

“Ugh... Aaah... Aaaaaaaaah...!”

Rained with kisses intense enough to yank his soul from his body altogether, Diablo was stupefied for a while.

Having received a summons, Diablo, Rem, and Shera made their way to the 《Observatory》... after putting their clothes on, of course.

“Oh, you’re finally alive, huh, Diablo? ♪” Sylvie called out to him.

“Good morning, Boss!” Horn raised her hand in greeting.

“M-Mm,” Diablo uttered.

“Hehehe... How was it?” Shera asked, sticking out her tongue bashfully.

“It was overkill,” he replied.

Looking at her tongue reminded him of the intense kiss they shared earlier, so he averted his gaze. Rem stood there with her gauntlets on her hands and her summon crystals lined up on her belt. Looking around, Diablo noted everyone else was likewise armed. Even Lumachina, much to his surprise.

“What’s going on?” Diablo asked, his expression turning severe.

“We’re all coming along,” Lumachina replied.

“Fools,” Diablo refused the idea curtly.

The most people Diablo ever really traveled with were Rem and Shera, and Lumachina was the High Priest, of all people.

“Lord Diablo, I hear you intend to charge the castle and defeat the enemy army’s commander?”

“Mm.”

“The Paladins and old priests all say there’s no other way of turning this war around. The difference in numbers is hopeless, and should they attack us again, we likely won’t be able to push them back.”

Diablo remained silent. Indeed, while Diablo fought off the Magimatic Sols, defensive lines crumbled elsewhere. If it weren’t for Rem’s presence, the capital could very well have fallen yesterday.

“Even if we hole up in the Inner Sanctum, the Empire’s soldiers are bound to attack us eventually. In which case, we would be better off offering you our assistance. Would we really be that much of a burden to you?”

“...Diablo, Lumachina’s healing and protective prayers are powerful,” Rem

spoke up. “And she’s familiar with the castle, too.”

“I’ll keep her safe!” Horn chimed in, raising a hand into the air enthusiastically.

Diablo was opposed to the idea, but their suggestion did make sense. If Diablo thought that keeping the Inner Sanctum was that important, he’d be better off staying to begin with.

Can I really protect all of them, though...?

Most of the magic he’d learned was offensive spells, and he had nothing in his arsenal to protect the whole party. As anxious as he was, his Demon Lord’s dignity stopped him from putting that concern into words. And besides, given the situation, no place was truly safe.

Diablo, Rem, Shera, Sylvie, Lumachina, and Horn — a party of six. And while Diablo never tried it in this world, the Teleportation spell could transport a maximum of six people.

“Hmph... You must obey my orders,” Diablo said, rising from the sofa. “If you cannot do that, I will take none of you with me.”

“...I obey your orders no matter what to begin with, Diablo,” Rem said, placing a hand over her neck.

“Same, same!” Shera said, pinching her enslavement collar between her fingers.

Diablo could hear the invisible chain clank.

“Roger, Boss!” Horn said, giving her best impression of a military salute.

“Opposing your word and gospel would never cross my mind, Lord Diablo,” Lumachina said, bringing her hands together as if in prayer.

“Haven’t you become the dependable leader, Diablo ♪” The last one remaining and the one sitting the furthest back, Sylvie, crossed her arms and nodded.

Perhaps she was the most suited to be the leader here, given that she was the guildmaster of the Adventurer’s Guild, but... A Demon Lord was, technically, a lord. Diablo pointed the Tenma’s Staff to the floor.

“I will now Teleport into Castle Grandiose and engage the enemy! If we defeat the enemy commander, Doriadanph, and free the Magimatic Sol pilots, the enemy army should collapse.”

“...And we must rescue Alicia, too,” Rem nodded.

“Are we gonna attack now instead of waiting for nightfall, Diablo?” Sylvie asked.

“Mm.”

This world had no electricity or fluorescent lamps, so it really was pitch-dark come nightfall. Elves and Pantherians had good night vision, but if they were to attack during the night, Diablo was susceptible to surprise attacks. He can’t fire spells at an opponent he can’t see, after all.

These were all things Diablo cared little for when he was just a gamer, but since coming to this world, experience taught him that fighting at night was dangerous.

“All right, let’s charge in!” Horn said, pumping her fist into the air. “Let’s go, let’s do this!”

“There’s someplace we must stop in first,” Diablo said.

“Huh?!” Horn flinched as her gusto popped like a balloon.

Ignoring her, Diablo cast his spell.

“Teleport!”

†

They were somewhere dark and dim. The torches on the walls flickered, making the shadows frolic. It was the 《Demon Lord’s Labyrinth》 — the very depths of the dungeon designed to strike terror into the hearts of anyone who entered it. It was an eerie, ominous, and overbearing place.

“Woow, we haven’t been here in forever!” Shera exclaimed.

“The Demon Lord’s Labyrinth! It’s been so long! It’s as creepy as ever!” Horn said, hopping excitedly.

“...Oh. So this is where,” Rem shrugged.

“It really is quite the nostalgic place...” Lumachina said, narrowing her eyes as if harkening back to some distant memory.

Diablo realized that these were, indeed, the party members he cleared this dungeon with. It gave him a bit of a mixed feeling. While he did understand where they were coming from, he’d have preferred it if they treated this place with the terror and horror it demanded as opposed to some odd sort of nostalgia...

Not that his intent was to scare them or anything, but...

They could at least pretend to be scared. Out of courtesy.

But among the group, there was one person who was visiting this place for the first time.

“Whoaaa?!” Sylvie cried out with her eyes wide in shock. “What is this place, a Demon Lord’s castle?!”

That’s it! Diablo looked at her with his eyes positively sparkling. *That’s the reaction I wanted! A hundred points and a good girl sticker for you, Sylvie!*

Diablo couldn’t help but grin.

“...Calm yourself, Sylvie,” Rem said calmly. “This is Diablo’s personal dungeon. We’re not in any danger here.”

“Wow, this place belongs to you?!” Sylvie asked in surprise.

“Mm,” Diablo nodded in affirmation.

“This is awesome! I thought we were in the 《Demon Lord’s Throne Room》!”
Straight A’s, Sylvie.

Diablo did design this room after the Demon Lord’s Throne Room’s official design.

“You’ve seen the Demon Lord’s Throne Room?” he asked.

Sylvie’s eyes widened and she clasped her hands over her mouth, as if realizing she’d just blurted out something she shouldn’t have. Everyone else eyed her curiously.

“If I recall, the former Demon Lord was overthrown thirty-one years ago,”

Lumachina said pensively. “Only six heroes reached the Demon Lord’s Throne Room in the depths of the Demon Lord’s castle... Or so the texts state.”

“You’re one diligent student, Lumachina,” Sylvie said with a forced smile.

“It’s the Church’s role to make sure history is passed down to the people.”

“Wait, huh?” Horn said, pointing at Sylvie. “So if you saw the Demon Lord’s Throne Room, that means you’re...”

“Ahaha...” Sylvie chuckled.

“You’re Alan, the Hero?!”

Sylvie fell backwards from exasperation.

“Of course I’m not! Don’t imply I’m anything like that weirdo!”

“Wait, you *know* Alan the Hero?!” Rem pressed on her.

“Fine, fine. I’ll talk,” Sylvie waved her hand, as if to signal that she’d thrown in the towel. “But you can’t go flapping your mouths about this, okay? No one else can know.”

She then removed a golden ring somewhere from what little fabric she wore and put it on her finger. The ring had a crest of wings etched onto it.

“...I’m actually the Hero Alan’s fifth companion.”

“Huuuuuuh?!” Shera and Horn exclaimed at once.

Rem looked aghast, and Lumachina brought her hands to her mouth in shock. Everyone looked surprised, and while Diablo looked as if he knew it all along... He was just as surprised as they were.

“It’s a story from back when I was younger,” Sylvie scratched her cheek shyly. “I haven’t gotten a chance to fight, recently, so I decided I’d focus on rearing up the next generation.”

“So Sylvie is a false name, yes?” Lumachina asked.

“Ah... Well, yeah... But being called by my old name feels kinda funny at this point.”

“E-Erm!” Horn leaned forward. “So what’s the Hero Alan doing?! Where is he

now?!”

“I don’t know that, either. Last thing we did is go around to give our regards to all the people who helped us on our journey, and then when we had a celebration feast in the castle, Alan just up and disappeared. And I haven’t heard a word about him since.”

“Huuuh?!”

“Well, Alan was pretty weird. Probably traveling around some other country at this point. If nothing else, I’m pretty sure Alan’s still alive.”

“...There are quite a few stories surrounding the Hero Alan,” Rem appended. “It’s said he changed his name and appearance, and is still traveling to save people.”

“Who’s to say? Before leaving, Alan told me, ‘It’s about time I go back.’”

“...Go back? I’d assume that means his hometown.”

“Nah. Alan’s hometown was attacked by the Fallen and destroyed.”

“...The records say that, too.”

He was the sole survivor of a Fallen attack on his village. The knights saved him, after which he came under the tutelage of many great teachers, gathered a group of wonderful companions, and went on a long journey that culminated with the defeat of the Demon Lord.

But what happened then?

“Alan’s face was known across the country, but there was no report of someone seeing him after that. Where could he have gone?”

No one could answer that question. Sylvie then looked at Diablo.

“It’s a mystery. In that regard, he’s kind of like you, Diablo. We don’t know where you came from.”

Diablo panicked a bit, and then waved off her question.

“I am no hero, but a Demon Lord from another world! Do not draw any comparisons between me and him.”

‘It’s about time I go back.’

A hero that appeared in a land on the verge of ruin at the hands of a Demon Lord. He displayed surprising growth and defeated the Demon Lord with power one could never imagine from someone of the races. And once peace settled over the land, he disappeared without a trace.

It feels like a hero in an RPG.

This world was quite similar to *Cross Reverie*, but it also had many points where it differed from the game. Diablo suspected this world might have served as an inspiration for the game. And if it did, there could have been other people who visited this world as game characters.

But the sound of footsteps clicking against the stone floor pulled Diablo out of his thoughts. A girl approached them from within the darkness. It was Rose, the Magimatic Maid.

“Welcome home, Master,” Rose bowed deeply.

“Mm,” Diablo nodded.

Rose’s damaged areas were already all fixed.

“Did some kind of problem crop up?” she asked, turning her gaze to Rem and the other girls.

“Mm... Rem, explain it.”

He’d somehow been able to talk to people (?) thanks to his Demon Lord role play, but Diablo was fundamentally bad at speaking. Learning from past experience, Rem explained the gist of the situation.

“...The Kingdom of Lyferia is being invaded by the Gelmed Empire that hails from the far east.”

“The Gelmed Empire?”

“...Rumor has it that the King of Lyferia died in battle. The castle has fallen, and we’ve holed up in the Grand Cathedral in the capital’s twelfth district. The difference in strength between the two armies is clear, however. And so, Diablo decided to teleport into the castle and launch an attack on the enemy commander.”

“The Gelmed Empire...” Rose tilted her head curiously. “Does such a place

truly exist? Rose cannot find any mention of it in her database.”

“...It’s a faraway country.”

“But Rose has the world map stored in her database.”

“...Well, I don’t know much about this database of yours.”

Rose seemed rather unconvinced. Her memories conformed to *Cross Reverie*’s setting and lore, which had no mention of the Gelmed Empire. That made sense, since Gelmed was based off of another game, the smartphone game *Girls’ Arms*.

I had a feeling this might be the case, but Rose really doesn’t remember anything about the Empire, huh...?

“By the way, the Empire uses something called Magimatic Sols...” Rem changed the subject. “They’re quite similar to the thing that always appears behind you, Rose.”

“It is indeed called the Magimatic Sol.”

“...You were created by someone, right? Could it have been the Gelmed Empire?”

Rose fell into a small silence. As if thinking... or rather, searching about the topic. But eventually, she shook her head.

“Rose believes it is a coincidence... There is no record of this in Rose’s database.”

“Good,” Diablo cut into their exchange. “Even if you do not know, it does not get in the way of your fighting, yes? We’re going to charge into Gelmed’s main encampment. I will have you act as vanguard.”

“By your will, Master,” Rose said, bowing her head deeply.

“Also, we’ll have to take some items we may need. This will likely become a dungeon exploration.”

Diablo never explored the castle in the game, but there’s no doubting that it was quite the spacious place. Rose led them to the treasure vault.

“We should have come to visit this place sooner,” Shera chimed in.

“...Think about it a little,” Rem retorted. “Do you remember how long it took us to come here and go back? It took days even when we used a sand ship or a carriage.”

“Huh? But we could teleport here.”

“...Teleporting to the capital would land us in the middle of the castle, it seems.”

“Oh!”

The way she didn't let the nitty-gritty details bother her was without a doubt part of Shera's charm, but it was also one of her faults. Rem rested a hand on her forehead and sighed. If the castle in the game was as vast as it is in this world, there likely would have been several teleportation spots dotted around it.

Diablo picked multiple items from his vault and placed them into the pouch hanging from his waist when he suddenly heard whispering.

“...Huh? For real?”

“No, but I'm a sorcerer right now...”

“Uuu... You're right, I should do what I do best to help!”

He thought she was speaking to someone, but apparently Horn was speaking to herself.

I know that feeling, Horn. I do that a lot too, Diablo nodded to himself.

What he didn't know was that Horn was speaking to the goddess of the Holy Grail, Babalon. Horn then stepped up to Diablo.

“Boss, can you lend me this dagger, please?”

“Mm, I permit you to use it if you wish.”

It was a level 80 dagger. It was a bad drop for Diablo, and he only kept it as a material of sorts, but it was still an SSR rarity item. It was a good weapon for light warrior classes, like thieves and seekers. It had a relatively high level cap and so it did have some enchantments and special effects, but...

“This isn't going to help you against a Magimatic Sol, you know?”

“Ugh...” Horn shook her hands in a flurry. “I’m not going to pick a fight with those things!”

“...Are we finally going to charge in, Diablo?” Rem asked him with a severe face.

“No, we’ll be stopping somewhere else first.”

“Where?”

“Sasara’s place.”

“...I see. Having the Swordmaster on our side will be reassuring.”

“Right.” Sylvie cast down her eyes.

Lumachina and Horn didn’t know about her power, since they weren’t there for the battle in Faltra against the Demon Overlord Modinaram.

“I’m sure she’ll help us!” Shera exclaimed, raising a hand cheerfully into the air. “Let’s go!”

†

“I must refuse,” Sasara said flatly.

“Huuuuuh?!” Shera raised her voice in shock.

Yeah, I figured, Diablo thought, biting his lips.

They were on 《Mount Tenzan》, at the Swordmaster’s estate. Sasara was seated on her feet, which Diablo recognized as a seiza-style. Diablo and his cohorts were all seated however they liked, since Lyferia had no customs of sitting on the floor.

Lumachina alone sat just like Sasara, trying to emulate her stance and sitting as upright as she could. And Rose was waiting outside, as there was the risk of the floor caving in under her weight.

“...Why can’t you help us, Sasara?”

“The last time I fought with you, it was a battle against a Demon Lord. The Swordmaster is one who wields her blade for the races... And so, I could lend you my help in a battle against the Fallen. But this time, this is a war mankind fights amongst itself, is it not?”

“...But the Empire is far too unjust and terrible.”

“But they’re still of the mortal races.”

“...That much is true.”

“And there could be those among the Gelmed Empire who had accepted the Swordmaster’s tutelage.”

Sasara only inherited the role of Swordmaster six months ago, and Diablo had a suspicion the Gelmed Empire were invaders from another world... But that was just his guess. They could well have existed in this world since the distant past.

“What would you do if someone from the Gelmed Empire was a student of mine, and came to me first to petition help in defeating Lyferia?”

“...We would be in trouble then.”

Sasara had once said that if Diablo was to fight her at full force with all of his magic, he would emerge victorious. But truly, who was to say how a fight between them might end? When Sasara was truly serious, her attacks became shockingly rapid. They were hard to block or dodge. She could well sever Diablo’s head before he knew it.

“I am not aligned with the Kingdom of Lyferia, nor do I obey the Gelmed Empire,” Sasara said, bowing her head. “And while I do think of you as my friends... Picking a side in a battle between Humans goes against the path of the Swordmaster.”

“No...” Shera uttered, her voice heartbroken.

“Forgive me. The Swordmaster is the one who shows others the peak of swordsmanship... Interfering with worldly matters would tarnish the role’s honor. Doing so would mean casting away everything the great founder and my stepfather have passed down to me.”

Sasara’s expression turned sorrowful. She was adopted by the former Swordmaster, and owed him a great debt of gratitude. And when he had become an Oni, she was forced to cut her stepfather down. The bond between the two of them was stronger than anyone unrelated could understand.

“If you wish to train for the upcoming battle, I would gladly accommodate...”

But Diablo had no such leisure, of course. Even as they spoke, the Gelmed Empire could well have been marching on the twelfth district. Diablo rose to his feet.

“As you say, you not becoming an enemy to us is good enough,” he said.

“I thank you for understanding my position. As a Swordmaster, I can’t help you... But you have helped me in the past, against my stepfather. I pray that we will meet again once this war ends.”

Sasara’s stepfather told Diablo to help his daughter. Forcing her to help them push back the Empire would surely make him turn in his grave.

“Hmph... We can beat back those fools even without the Swordmaster’s help!” Diablo said, trying to appear as tough as he could.

But while their conversation was over... Sasara turned her eyes to Lumachina. This was their first meeting, it seemed.

“You are...” Sasara muttered.

“My apologies for not introducing myself. I am Lumachina Weselia, the High Priest.”

“So you really are...”

“It might come across as strange, but... It doesn’t feel like the first time we’ve met, Miss Sasara.”

“I feel the same way, in fact,” Sasara nodded.

“I would like a chance for us to speak of this more deeply someday.”

“I feel the same way... Once this matter is put to rest, perhaps I shall visit the capital.”

“I look forward to it,” Lumachina said.

“I would love for you to taste my Swordmaster soba, as well.”

“...Soba?”

Neither of them smiled and they spoke in rather business-like tones, but their

exchange was rather calm and pleasant.

Diablo and his group left the estate.

“It’s such a shame...” Shera said, her shoulders drooped in disappointment.

“...There isn’t much to be done,” Rem replied, shaking her head. “We all have motives and principles we can’t budge on. We should honor her decision.”

“To think she would go against Master’s orders...” Rose, who had waited outside throughout the whole exchange, took the news with a grim expression.

Horn and Shera tried to placate her, while Sylvie spoke up.

“Okay, time to shift gears, everyone! Cuz we’re charging the castle next. We’ll teleport right into the enemy camp! Let’s get going and keep in mind what we’re up against.”

“Okaaaay!”

“...You’re right.”

“Roger that!”

Rem and the others nodded, their eyes turning serious. It would have usually been Diablo’s place to say that line, with a stiff, unyielding voice.

Standing next to them, Sasara was beating flints together.

“It is said that smoke can repel misfortune, so this is a charm for repelling bad luck. I cannot join you, but know that I pray for your success.”

“Thank you, Sasara,” Rem bowed her head.

“Bye bye!” Shera waved enthusiastically.

Diablo steeled his resolve and gripped the Tenma’s Staff firmly. He would need to be prepared for a few possible situations, and there were sure to be things he could not foresee. He had to prepare himself for what was to come.

He then thrust his staff up toward the heavens.

“Teleport!”

Chapter 3: Invading the Castle

In *Cross Reverie*, the portal one would land in when teleporting to the capital was inside the castle's courtyard. It was a comfortable spot in game, since it was close to the audience chamber, and offered easy access to the blacksmith, tool store, and the exit from the castle.

But in this world, one wouldn't normally have access to this place. If anyone could simply teleport here, they'd surround the place with walls to impede people from leaving or entering easily. The courtyard would be a critical weak point for the castle one would need to be wary of.

Teleportation magic wasn't developed enough to be in popular use in this society. Diablo hadn't met anyone else but him who actually used this kind of spell.

Maybe the portal is different in this world?! Or what if they really did surround it with walls, or have a lot of soldiers lying in wait? Or worse, maybe they piled up rocks on the spot to block it!

Even with all those anxieties in his heart, Diablo chanted the spell. They became particles of light and flew off. The scenery flew past them as they crossed mountains and rivers to instantaneously appear in the capital. And by the time Diablo thought he could see it, they'd already descended into the castle's courtyard.

In the game, the courtyard was something of a plaza, but now it was full of wooden crates. Just as he'd noticed the crates, his field of vision turned over.

"Whoa?!"

I knew something unpredictable was gonna happen!

Diablo had teleported them into Castle Grandiose, but as it turned out, the courtyard was full of the Imperial army's provisions. Diablo swiftly used his flight magic to levitate and avoid tumbling into the crates.

"Phew," Shera managed to stand upright.

“...Hop,” Rem managed to balance herself, too.

As uneven as the footing was, her superior athletic skills prevented her from embarrassing herself. Shera, on the other hand, was an Elf who was used to living on treetops, and was able to effortlessly stand on the wobbling wooden crates as if they were solid ground. Meanwhile, Sylvie supported Lumachina by grabbing her by the arm to stabilize her.

“You all right?”

“Ah, thank you kindly.”

And Horn was a level 80 thief, so she naturally... or, well, so Diablo expected, but as it turned out, Rose — who was heavier than a fully-armored knight on horseback — landed right next to her. Wooden crates and barrels couldn’t hope to support her weight, and they crumbled with a cracking sound.

“Kuh...” Rose grimaced.

“Waaaaaah?!” Horn, on the other end, slipped down the avalanche of broken lumber with a shriek, eventually landing on the wooden floor on her butt.

And this, of course, summoned a large number of guards to the courtyard. Twelve Imperial guards rushed toward them.

“Tch...!” Diablo aimed the Tenma’s Staff at the approaching soldiers.

If possible, he’d have liked to avoid making a commotion before reaching the enemy commander. But just as that thought crossed his mind, Horn hopped to her feet and did something odd. She stuck out her behind to the soldiers and flipped up her skirt, revealing her slender thighs and underwear.

“Oh, phooey. I bwuised my butt. Horn’s gonna cwy~” she said in a sweet, baby voice.

Not just Diablo, but even Rem and the others froze up.

What the hell?! Did you fall on your head instead of your butt?!

“Ahaahaa,” Horn said, her face red as a beet and her voice shrill enough to ring in Diablo’s ears. “Misters, won’t you pwease wisten to what Horn says?”

A heart-shaped ball of mana flew from Horn, and impacted the soldiers’

chests.

Was that magic?!

The soldiers were glaring daggers at them, but the next moment their angry expressions crumbled away.

“Oh, is that you, Horn?”

“You poor thing, you fell on your butt?”

“Want me to kiss the boo-boo until it’s all better?”

“Hey, if you say something that gross to Horn again, I’ll tear your head off!”

The guards treated Horn — who was very much a trespasser and an invader — like she was some kind of idol. Horn simply brought her hands together and winked.

“Hey, Misters, the Imperial commander called me over, can you tell me which way to go?”

The soldiers all pointed in one direction.

“That’d be that way.”

“Just be careful, Horn!”

“Cuz the commander’s a freak!”

“Cut that out, idiot, if he hears you it’s off with all of our heads!”

Horn struck meandering, cute poses, and each time she did, heart-shaped mana went flying toward the soldiers.

“Don’t worry, I’ve got my friends with me! Right?” she said, turning to look at Diablo.

Diablo landed, while Rem and the others got off the piled-up crates.

“...What was that, Horn?” Rem asked, her eyes narrowed suspiciously.

“Aaah...” Horn uttered, her face red. “I told myself I’d never use this again...”

Sylvie cackled loudly.

“What do you guys care? It’s convenient for us♪” she said. “Hey misters, can

you do Horn a favor and keep this a secret?”

Her first order of business was to silence the guards. The men nodded. Led by Sylvie, Diablo’s group moved from the courtyard into the castle’s interior.

†

The group walked through the corridors of the castle.

“I suppose it’s better than having to fight,” Diablo said, shrugging.

Horn followed behind him, her face still flushed.

“Uuuu... Believe me, I didn’t do that because I wanted to...” she mumbled with tears in her eyes.

“So you picked the 《Charm》 skill,” Sylvie commented, apparently familiar with it. “Not a lot of adventurers acquire this skill since it’s useless for fighting monsters, but it’s useful in its own way♪”

“I mean, I didn’t really pick it...” Horn said, defensively.

“...Can you really call that an adventurer’s skill?” Rem asked coldly.

“That’s harsh!”

But Shera’s expression was apparently the opposite of Rem’s.

“Maybe I should learn that skill, too! Maybe it’ll make Diablo all lovey-dovey with me!” she exclaimed with sparkling eyes.

“It doesn’t work on people who’re a higher level than you,” Horn punctured the idea bubbling up in Shera’s mind.

“Boo~” Shera frowned.

Falling in love with someone because of a skill sounded like a bad idea to Diablo.

They then took a turn in the corridor, immediately encountering five enemy soldiers.

Sentries?!

“《Freeze Zone》!” Diablo fired a spell faster than they could react.

It didn’t even take a moment for the soldiers to freeze over completely. They

stood completely still and silent. Diablo didn't know if they'd actually still be alive by the time they thawed out — that depended on their levels. That thought made his heart screech.

Don't think about it...

Trying to carry the blame for the enemy soldiers' lives at this point would make his mind crack under the pressure, and so Diablo decided to think of something else. Back in the game, he'd picked his spells while only considering the enemy's elemental affinities, but in this reality, there was so much more to consider.

Especially when it came to infiltrations like this one, sound was a major factor. Using an explosion-type spell would be like flipping on the alarm, calling many soldiers to them. Fire element spells often produced explosions. Earth element spells created tremors and shockwaves. To that end, water spells were relatively silent. Some dark element spells were silent as well, but they gradually defeated the enemy, which meant they might raise their voice.

"...If Alicia were here, she could show us around the castle," Rem whispered.

Yeah, she'd be perfect to have around right about now... Diablo thought to himself grimly.

"Do not worry, I can show you the way," Lumachina stepped forward. "Some of the followers often work in the castle, so I've gotten some detailed information out of them."

"...Do you know the way to the king's room?"

"The maid in charge of making his bed told me how to get there."

"...And you're certain that's sound information?"

"She's a devout believer. I trust her."

"Then let's let Lumachina show us the way," Sylvie summed up their decision. "But let's tread carefully. There could be Gelmed soldiers around any corner."

"...Yes, I'd assume the main corridors are crawling with soldiers," Rem nodded in agreement.

"There's a shortcut to the king's office through there," Lumachina said,

pointing at a small passageway.

“Wow, that’s great! Lumachi-mgmgmgmg?!” Shera exclaimed before Rem’s hands clasped over her mouth.

“...Idiot,” Rem chided her.

Thankfully, no soldiers heard her.

“Normally, it’s a secret passageway to allow His Majesty to escape in times of crisis,” Lumachina continued her explanation. “Assuming the Empire didn’t discover it, we can use it to infiltrate the office.”

“...And if they did, we’re walking into a trap,” Rem said, her expression hardening.

Rem was brave, but cautious.

“Hmph...” Diablo scoffed at the prospect. “If there’s a trap spread out for us, then let’s let the enemy commander approach. I’ll burn it all to ashes.”

He motioned for Lumachina to show the way, and Rose stood ahead of the group.

“If there is risk of a trap, Rose will assume the vanguard,” she stated.

“Then I leave it to you,” Diablo nodded.

“Yes, Master.”

†

They walked through a narrow corridor for some thirty minutes. The floor seemed to go up and down for a while, but eventually, Diablo and his party were met with a door.

“Going through here should place us right in front of the audience chamber,” Lumachina whispered.

“Mm. So it doesn’t lead directly to the king’s room.”

“...I’d assume it’s heavily guarded,” Rem said.

Diablo had been to the audience chamber before. He’d spoken to the King of Lyferia, and fired a 《Glacies Cannon》 spell.

“From here on out, we’re in a race against time. We have to overwhelm the garrison before the commander escapes.”

“...Understood,” Rem said, and Shera, Horn, Lumachina, and Sylvie all nodded in agreement.

“Shall Rose open it, Master?” Rose, who stood in front of them all, reached for the door.

“Yes. Go!”

The ‘door’ swung open — revealing it was in fact a gigantic portrait on the other side. It led to a corridor full of pieces of artwork, and one of them was a hidden door. The door — or rather, the painting — struck against a guard’s back hard with a thud.

“Huh?” The guard blinked in surprise.

“Out of Rose’s way!”

Rose swung her double-headed blade down on the guard as he turned around. Crimson blood splattered over the red carpet.

“To the right-hand door!” Lumachina shouted.

Rose sprinted in accordance with Lumachina’s instructions.

“Rose’s Master is passing through! Step aside!”

Standing in front of the large door were heavily-armored Imperial soldiers. They held weapons in their hands reminiscent of large magi-guns — Magimatic weapons.

“Aaah?!”

“Intruders! Shoot them!”

One man — apparently a commander — started shouting orders, and the Imperial soldiers opened fire.

Ratatatatatatatatata!

These Magimatic weapons were effectively machine guns. Even their rank and file soldiers, who weren’t equipped with Magimatic Sols, were armed with these kinds of weapons, making them exceptionally dangerous.

Seriously?!

The bullets hit Rose as she sprinted toward the soldiers, but they apparently lacked the force to destroy her.

“This isn’t enough to stop Rose!”

“Hiii?!”

She swung her double-headed sword through the air, splitting the soldiers’ heads — along with their Magimatic firearms — in half.

“Dodge this, Rose!” Diablo cried out, aiming his staff at the door.

“Yes, Master!” Rose replied as she jumped away.

“《Flare Burst》!” Diablo shouted.

Some part of him considered going all out and firing a 《White Nova》 spell instead, but the fact that Alicia could be trapped beyond stopped him from doing so. He instead used a weaker spell that would still be strong enough to blow the sturdy doors open.

The powerful blast shook the building. Of course, Diablo realized they were way past the point of being discreet or stealthy about their presence... But now all the enemies in the castle knew someone was there. Thankfully, he’d calculated the Flare Burst’s force correctly, and it left a large hole in the doorway.

“...Diablo!” he heard Rem call out behind him. “Go ahead on your own!”

“What?!”

Turning around, he saw a large army rushing down the corridor to intercept them.

“...I’ll keep them occupied here!” Rem said, sinking low in a combat-ready position with her gauntlets equipped.

“Me, too!” Shera called out, holding her black bow at the ready.

Just the two of them against that army?! Can they handle this?!

Rem in particular was being targeted by the Empire. Perhaps Diablo ought to have left more people to help them, but the chance of the commander sending

Magimatic Sols to stop Diablo when he did face him was high. He couldn't afford to remove Rose from the vanguard, and Lumachina was their guide. And while he couldn't quite rely on Horn to be of use in combat, her Charm skill wouldn't work if the sum total of the enemy group's levels exceeded hers.

And so, the one to stand at Rem and Shera's side was Sylvie.

"All righty, Diablo, you can leave the two of them to me, 'kay?"

"B-But..."

"If you don't hurry up, our target's gonna get away, you know?"

"Kuh! Then I leave them in your hands!"

"Sure thing, bud♪" Sylvie raised a hand.

Shera and Rem finished preparing for battle.

"We can do this!"

"...Leave this to us."

Leaving the three of them behind, Diablo hurried ahead. The approaching soldiers started firing at them, but Rem built up the Glow nestled within her body. Kneading it into armor that surrounded her body, she became slightly more resistant to their attacks.

"Nng?!" The Enemy commander swallowed nervously. "Ah, that's... the Girl of the Vessel! Whoever captures her is promised the position of general, you hear?!"

"Ooooooh!" The soldiers cheered as they rushed Rem with the intent of capturing and not eliminating her.

"《Ivy Bind Forest IV》!" Sylvie snapped her fingers.

The floor broke down beneath the soldiers, and from the cracks, large vines erupted, extending as if to block the corridor. The enemy soldiers shouted as the vine creepers coiled around their limbs, like a living jungle had sprouted within the castle.

"...That was incredible," Rem said, her eyes wide in shock. "I didn't know you were that powerful of a sorcerer, Sylvie."

“Nah, I was never serious because I was focused on training the next generation... But now’s not the time for that!”

“I guess you didn’t really need us here, after all,” Shera said, but what happened next proved that statement was wrong.

An explosion boomed in the corridor, burning the vines and the ensnared soldiers all at once. The heatwave that resulted from the blast made Rem and the others wince and cover their faces. From beyond the flames, something approached them, shooting out steam as it stepped forward.

A violet-colored Magimatic Sol.

Rem’s throat dried up at once and she let out a hoarse moan.

“...Violanos of the Purple.”

It was the same unit that pursued and beat her to near death, and the one that captured Alicia. As the Magimatic Sol slowly moved its massive frame through the narrow corridor, a dull voice rang out from it.

“To think you would come here of your own accord! I’ll carve Rikka and Erina’s grudges into your very limbs!”

That booming voice was dripping with hatred. Erina was in fact still alive and well, but Rem and Shera weren’t informed of that.

“...I have nothing to do with you,” Rem said, clenching her fist. “Where is Alicia?! A Human woman, clad in red armor.”

“Like I care!”

†

Diablo felt panic overtake him. A large number of soldiers — more than would be necessary to stall them — rushed the audience chamber. Diablo and his party rushed through the chamber and found the king’s room, but while they scoured the office, the living room, and the bedroom, they found no trace of the enemy commander, Doriadanph.

“Kuh...”

Did he get away, or did he just happen to be out?!

“Rose detects no lifeforms except for you in the vicinity,” Rose reported.
“There is no one else in this room.”

Diablo expected to find Doriadanph sitting on the throne, but he wasn’t even in the king’s room. Lumachina, however, glared at the office’s table.

“Lord Diablo, there’s still steam rising from this cup!” she exclaimed.

“Oh...”

That means he was here just now!

It took them less than three minutes from when the fighting in the audience chamber broke out to get into the room. There couldn’t have been a back door to escape from, because the more corridors a castle has, the weaker it is when attacked by the enemy.

“I can feel a breeze from here!” Horn called out, pointing at a heavy-looking bookshelf.

After inspecting the shelf shortly, she pulled one book back. Something clicked audibly, and the bookshelf slid away with the sound of rotating gears.

As one might have expected, a secret passageway appeared behind the shelf. Some older King of Lyferia likely had it built... But Diablo couldn’t help but think that building a hidden passage in a room in the center of a guarded castle sitting in the heart of a citadel city was overkill.

“That was incredible, Horn! A fine catch!” Lumachina praised the Grasswalker girl.

“You’re gonna make me blush!” Horn said, scratching her cheek awkwardly.

“Well done, Horn,” Diablo said as well, positively impressed.

“Hehehe...”

“So you were not a thief who only knows how to flash her buttocks.”

“Can you forget about that already?!”

And so, they entered the hidden passage, with Rose in the lead.

Meanwhile...

Violanos of the Purple threw away the weapon it used to burn through the vines. As overcome with hatred as it was, it still had no intention of killing Rem. Of course, that's only because it knew that being captured would just land Rem in a fate worse than death...

Rem clenched her fists and stood at the ready. She exhaled loudly; breathing was fundamental for using the Glow. Shera nocked an arrow and fired it at Violanos' head — or rather, its eyes. Diablo had told her before that this was one of its weak points.

"So you're finally ready to give up on being a Summoner and becoming a Grappler, huh, Rem?"

"...Excuse me?"

"I mean, I kind of get that focusing on the bow would make me more helpful."

"...I think that's a correct decision overall. So much so that I'm surprised you could actually come to that conclusion on your own."

In fact, seeing as her only Summon Beast was 《Turkey Shot》, Rem felt like Shera's insistence that she was a Summoner was almost an insult to the profession.

"Remember how Solami said you're more suited to being a Grappler, too?"

"...But I'm a Summoner."

Sylvie, however, cut their argument short.

"It's coming!"

"I'll start by crushing these two nuisances!" Violanos exclaimed as it charged them.

"Fall back to the room!" Sylvie ordered the two.

Shera screeched as she ran, and Rem swiftly leapt into the audience chamber. They'd already been here once, and it was a fairly large place. When she was here last time, it was full of attendants with the king reclined on his throne, so she was quite nervous at the time.

But now, the only things in the room were the toppled bodies of Imperial soldiers. Otherwise, the room looked like a ruin. The torches were put out, and the place was gloomy, the only light being the sunlight filtering in from the skylight windows above.

“Ha! You actually picked an open place! It’s easier for me to move here!”

“Yeah, but if we were in a tight space, this battle would just come down to brute strength~” Sylvie stuck her hand out.

A mana glow flickered in her hands, forming an afterglow in the air as she waved her hands, drawing a magic circle...

Normally, magic only needed an incantation to trigger, but using 《Circle-type Spells》 that made use of magic circles further increased the power of a spell. Of course, these required preparation, which made them unsuited for battle.

“《Chain Bind》!”

Several chains shot out of the magic circle, coiling around Violanos like angry serpents.

“You think this’ll stop me?!” Violanos exclaimed as it tried to free itself, creating cracks in the chains.

“Shera!”

“Got it! 《Unicorn Shot》!”

Using a bow martial art, a shot several times stronger than a normal attack was fired at the Magimatic Sol’s head. Shera accurately fired during the momentary lag where Violanos would be incapable of moving, and her arrow hit its mark — stabbing directly into Violanos’ eye.

“Agh! Don’t get cocky just because you busted my Main Camera! I still have my 《Mind’s Eye》!”

Tearing away the magical chains, the Magimatic Sol rushed at Sylvie and Shera.

“Oh crap!” Sylvie bolted away.

“Aaaaah?!” Shera screamed, standing planted in place.

Shera was a potent attacker, but extremely weak to being attacked herself. But as Violanos charged Shera head on, Rem pressed on Violanos from the side, her fist swung...

“《Glow Punch》!” She bashed against Violanos’ shoulder.

“Aaaaaaaaah?!” Violanos went flying, its pilot letting out a screech that was far too cute to be associated with the fearsome voice they’d heard so far, as the machine’s right shoulder pauldron fell apart.

“Yay!” Shera hopped up and down, her hands held high. “I knew it! Rem, you’re a Grappler!”

“I. Am. A. Summoner!” Rem breathed out as she pursued her target.

Violanos, of course, launched a counterattack.

“Stop scurrying around, you pest!” Violanos thrust its massive fist at Rem.

Had it been the previous fight, Rem would have wavered and been overwhelmed... But right now, Rem was agile enough to dodge a moving bullet.

“...You make too many pointless movements.”

Rem sprung up, avoiding Violanos’ fist. She stuck out her left hand, aimed at Violanos’ broken right shoulder, then shouted: “《Asulau》!”

The blue crystal in her hand shattered, manifesting a Summon Beast. As it was by no means a high level summon, it would usually be dispatched before it could achieve anything. But this time, this wasn’t a concern, because the moment it appeared, it hit the enemy with pinpoint accuracy. Asulau crushed Violanos’ right shoulder.

“Aaaaaaah!”

The Magimatic Sol’s right arm fell to the ground with a heavy thud. Depleting its HP, Asulau turned into a black crystal that sprung back to Rem, who landed on the ground and quickly created some distance between herself and her massive opponent.

“...This is my power as a Summoner,” she said boastfully.

“That’s not fair!” Shera said, pointing a finger at her.

“How is it not fair?!”

“Don’t get careless!” Sylvie chided the two of them sharply. “Now that we’ve cornered it, the battle’s really getting started!”

Violanos grunted.

“You think you have me cornered...? You think you have *me*... cornered?! I’ll show you why we Oni eat the races!”

Crimson tentacles spurted out of its severed shoulder.

“What is this?” Rem took a few more steps back cautiously.

“Die! Die! Die! I don’t care if you’re the vessel anymore! I’ll kill you!”

The tentacles spilling out of Violanos’ right shoulder slithered like snakes toward Rem. It wouldn’t let her escape.

“...Very well,” Rem said, gripping Summon Crystals in both hands. “The Gadou style was created to fight alongside Summon Beasts. I won’t fall back, even if I’m up against the mightiest serpent or the greatest giant!”

†

Diablo’s party hurried through the secret passageway. There were a few traps set up along the way, but none of them were capable of damaging Rose. Before long, they found themselves outside.

“This is the courtyard!”

At first, they thought they’d gone back to where they started, but this was a different courtyard. Rather than crates, there were roses planted all over the garden. Despite being surrounded by buildings, it was more than wide enough for them to fight.

“It seems we’ve been ambushed,” Diablo said, holding up his staff.

“Heheheh... Right you are, intruder,” a hoarse voice replied.

A large, fat man stood in the center of the courtyard. Given his physique, he likely wasn’t a soldier.

“Are you Doriadanph, the commander?”

“That would be Lord Doriadanph to you, insolent fool,” the fat man replied with audacity one wouldn’t expect from a man who scurried away from danger.

But of course, the reason for his bravado was clearly evident — three Magimatic Sols were lined up before him.

“《Raumunus of the Ash》, 《Viridinus of the Emerald》, and!” Doriadanph presented them grandly, like a child bragging about his toys. “The very Magimatic Sol that claimed the life of Lyferia’s king, 《Erurenus of the Yellow》!”

“Hey now... Just four intruders? Are three of us really necessary for this?” A muffled voice could be heard coming out of Raumunus.

“Nng...” Viridinus replied with a pessimistic, half-hearted exclamation.

But in contrast to the other two, Erurenus was clearly belligerent.

“Ahaha! I don’t caaaaare! I’m getting bored here, so I’m fiiiine so long as I have something to cut uuup~”

To add to the poor situation, Imperial soldiers filed out of the building and into the courtyard.

“Aaaah, we’re in trouble!” Diablo could feel Horn shivering at his side.

“Kuh... Fighting here is dangerous, Lord Diablo,” Lumachina said anxiously.

“Rose awaits Master’s orders,” Rose said, standing at the ready.

Diablo had absolutely no intention of playing along with the opponent’s intentions. All he had to do was defeat the commander.

“Hmph... This situation is well within my expectations! 《Cross Blizzard》!”

A level 110 water and wind elemental spell. Two tornadoes formed, freezing anything they touched and crushing them with powerful gales of wind. The spell did little to faze the Magimatic Sols, but the commander was standing there unguarded.

According to what Erina told him, he was a Magimatic mage. Diablo couldn’t quite recall if *Girls’ Arms* story mentioned anything about that, but while the Gelmed Empire employed Magimatic Sols as their main force, their rank and file soldiers were armed with Magimatic weapons. It wasn’t all too surprising.

It did beg the question, though, of how Magimatic mages fit into this world's logic. But Diablo didn't have the time to look into it, so he would have to figure out while fighting them.

He's relying on the Magimatic Sols to do the fighting for him, so I doubt he's that strong.

The Cross Blizzard froze the roses around the garden, shattering them to pieces. The soldiers retreated back into the building, while screaming, 'Evacuate! Pull back!' And Doriadanph...

"Gaaaah!"

Let out a scream and turned white.

"You did it!" Horn pumped a fist enthusiastically.

But the ice that encased Doriadanph then crumbled away all too easily.

"Hufufu! You thought this would defeat me?! Fools! Magic has no effect on me!"

Diablo's eyes widened. Even the Magimatic Sols took some damage from the spell. Even a Demon Lord would be at least somewhat affected by a level 110 spell.

"Tch... He has magic resistance that surpasses even that of a Demon Lord, or some means of canceling out magic attacks... But how about physical damage?!"

He had to have some kind of weakness, physical or magical, otherwise he wouldn't have fled from Diablo and his group and would have faced them head on in the audience chamber. Given his personality so far, Doriadanph was the sort to find pleasure in taunting the enemy when he held the advantage. But rather than facing them head-on, he relied on the Magimatic Sols to protect him.

"Rose, bring him down!" Diablo ordered.

"Yes, Master!" Rose charged forward like an arrow.

"Magimatic Sols, destroy the intruders!" Doriadanph ordered in turn.

“Ooh, you’re fast~♪” taunted Erurenus.

“Out of Rose’s way! 《Asterismos》!”

The space behind Rose’s back undulated, after which a massive double-headed sword appeared from thin air, followed by a pair of gigantic arms. This was her Magimatic Sol. Their joints looked like hinges, and artery-like pipes ran across them. Many of its particularities differed from the Empire’s Magimatic Sols.

“Huh?!”

Erurenus was apparently the one to raise its voice in surprise, as the shock seemed to have made it falter for a moment.

“《Krios》!”

A sideways sweep — but Erurenus took a step back, resulting in the slash gouging slightly across its chestpiece.

“Aha! Ahahahahaha!”

“Mm...?”

“I think this was called, 《Zeronus of the Black》?”

“Zeronus of the Black...? This is Rose’s...?”

“A relic of the old Empire! Apparently before they found compatibles like me, they had machines like you handle the Magimatic Sols! But they’re all thrown in the trash now, because us compatibles are so much stronger!”

“Rose is not weak.”

“Ahaha... The old, mass-produced models are like practice dummies for us! I beat lots of them during training! Didn’t think I’d have to fight them again heeeere!”

“You just... called Rose a training dummy.”

“You better fight me at full strength, though! I kind of want to play around!”

Erurenus closed the distance, swinging its two swords down. Rose’s Magimatic Sol, Zeronus of the Black, blocked its swings, but was pushed back by the sheer force of the blows.

“?!”

The gap in power was too great. Zeronus was huge compared to someone of the races, but it was a head smaller than the Empire’s Magimatic Sols. The newer, bigger model was of course stronger. This made sense for weapons. And this meant Rose couldn’t hope to beat it one-on-one.

Diablo wanted to support her, but it was difficult to manage. Doriadanph ordered the Magimatic Sols to ‘destroy the intruders,’ which meant the other two wouldn’t just spectate. While Diablo didn’t exactly feel any will to fight, the other two Magimatic Sols were definitely standing in his way.

“I think it’s too late for you guys, but if you have some way of escaping, I’d recommend you take it.”

“...Yeah.”

Those words of warning weren’t spoken out of bravado or grandness — Diablo only felt honesty in their voices. Diablo couldn’t help but feel a surge of sympathy toward the pilots.

“You really are being forced to fight, aren’t you...?”



Raumunus of the Ash and Viridinus of the Emerald seemed to waver at this statement.

“How much do you know...?!”

“Uu...”

He could tell them Erina told him this and that would have settled it quickly, but Doriadanph would hear him. And there was no telling what he might do if he found out she leaked information... And so, Diablo simply kept glaring at them.

“What are you doing?! Kill them!” Doriadanph bellowed, kicking them in the back.

Raumunus’ pilot clicked her tongue and moved forward.

“If you’re not running, we’ll kill you! Sorry, but these are my orders!”

Raumunus approached Diablo, sharp claws extended from the back of its hand with a clink. Bear claws, as they’re called.

Whoa! This is... kinda cool.

But as cool as they looked, each claw was as large as a spear, and Diablo couldn’t afford to zone out with this thing sweeping down to kill him. After all, Lumachina and Horn were behind him, and if they were to be attacked by a Magimatic Sol, the result would be gruesome.

Viridinus of the Emerald also moved, hoping to support Raumunus. It was armed with a gigantic mallet. Normally, the ones armed with melee weapons took the vanguard while the ones carrying ranged weapons guarded the rear, but this time, all three Magimatic Sols were melee fighters.

This was likely because they were in the middle of an enemy stronghold and surrounded by Imperial soldiers. If Diablo and his group were to run around, there was no telling how many losses the Empire might take from a ranged weapon. Even Doriadanph could potentially be hit by a stray bullet.

That’d be a lucky accident for us, though...

But Diablo could only feel like their operation here was falling apart.

“You are truly foolish to challenge a Demon Lord to battle!” he said menacingly, but his heart was full of bitterness.

I guess I have to fight them after all...

After hearing Erina’s story, Diablo didn’t want to fight the Magimatic Sol pilots if possible. But the situation didn’t allow for it, and Diablo was only left with regret. Couldn’t there have been a better way? It was regrettable, but he couldn’t afford to retreat.

“Gather forth, Light,” Diablo chanted, pointing his staff. “《Hercules Lance》!”

A level 120 light element attack. A massive lance of light that dwarfed even the Magimatic Sol’s mallet shot off at blinding speed, aiming at the opponent’s head, specifically its less-armored eyes.

The enemy was of course aware of all this, and was cautious of Diablo’s attack.

“Whoa...!”

Viridinus evaded the spell, but at the cost of losing its balance.

“Flare Burst!” Diablo rapidly unleashed another spell.

“Ugh?!”

The spell hit its mark head-on, but didn’t deal enough damage to destroy the unit.

“Oh, you did it now...!”

“Its magic resistance is high, so spells that aren’t above the limit break cap don’t affect it, huh...?” he pondered aloud.

“Saya! Let’s take him on together!”

“...Mm!”

Raumunus and Viridinus split off, approaching Diablo from both sides. Diablo remembered this from *Girls’ Arms*, a 《Combination Attack》 that used two units.

“《Volcanic Wall》!” Diablo fired a spell at one of them.

“Huh?!”

Viridinus’ charge was impeded when a wall of flames billowed up right in front of it. The fact it stopped its charge so easily was a bit suspicious... But Diablo assumed the pilot just didn’t have the nerve to keep going.

With this, Viridinus was impeded, but Raumunus was still barreling toward Diablo, its claws up.

“Ooooh! This is war, where the weak die!”

“I agree completely...《Rock Cannon》!”

Using his omit skill, he fired powerful spells in fast succession without chanting. A giant boulder formed near the tip of his staff and was launched forward, hitting its opponent at close range.

“Nnnnnng?!”

At first confident that there was no chance the Magimatic Sol could dodge that one, Diablo’s eyes widened as Raumunus curved its upper half back like a string.

“It can’t be!” he exclaimed in shock.

The spell skimmed and scraped off some of Raumunus’ head armor, but it wasn’t a direct hit. All three of them moved back, making distance between each other.

“Kahaha! Not bad! I think I wet myself a bit there!”

“...Uuu... Fire, scary...”

How did it dodge that Rock Cannon?! I fired it at point-blank range! Did she read my line of sight?!

On the surface, though, Diablo cloaked his surprise.

“Heheheh... I’d expect no less. It would be all too boring if you two were to break down now!”

“Tch... This guy’s a combat nut, just like Toaha. Maybe we should have let her handle him instead...”

“They’re... almost done over there.”

No way!

Diablo turned his gaze to where Rose and Erurenus were fighting, and at that same moment, the sound of something metallic snapping echoed through the room.

†

“Nngh...?!” Rose crumpled to the ground.

“Ahahaha! I’m surprised! It’s the first time I’ve fought a Zeronus of the Black model that’s this strong! How did you manage it? Is it because you have a lot of EXP? Or are you just special?!”

“R-Rose has...”

Erurenus of the Yellow tore both the arms off of Rose’s Magimatic Sol. Its weapon was smashed, shards falling to the ground. It was completely destroyed — Diablo wondered to himself with a sense of dread if it could even be repaired at this point?

“That was more fun than I expected!” Erurenus, by contrast, was mostly unharmed.

“Rose has not yet lost...!” She stood up, holding up her double-headed sword.

But of course, without a Magimatic Sol, she couldn’t hope to match them in battle.

“Step down, Rose!” Diablo shouted at her.

“M-Master...?!”

“I shall handle the rest!”

“...Understood,” Rose said bitterly.

Diablo was anxious the enemy might not let her go, but apparently they’d lost interest in her once she wasn’t able to put up a fight. Erurenus of the Yellow’s pilot, Toaha, turned her gaze to Diablo.

“Heheheh... It’s you, right? The sorcerer that defeated Rikka and Erina?” she asked.

“It was him?!”

“What...?!”

Diablo could hear the pilots of the ashen and green Magimatic Sols swallow nervously.

“Ahahaha, there can’t be too many people who can fire that many powerful spells in Lyferia, right?!” Toaha laughed.

“Kuh... So it was you... You’re the one who killed Rikka and Erina!”

“Grr...!”

Having someone direct hatred toward him for killing a friend was much more emotionally taxing than Diablo had imagined. He fought to protect his friends too, and that meant he understood how they felt.

“Kuh...” Diablo felt his pulse rising.

This was a dangerous situation. He was up against three essentially unscathed Magimatic Sols. Only high level magic could hope to properly damage them, and he didn’t have the time to chant. Rose was out of commission, and he had Lumachina and Horn behind him.

Lumachina chanted a prayer to increase her party’s offensive power, but it wouldn’t work on Rose or Diablo. Rose was a machine, and Diablo’s Demon Lord’s Ring would reflect it away. Lumachina knew all of this, as well.

Why is she chanting, then...?

Lumachina then raised her voice.

“Erina Reufelia still draws breath!” she proclaimed loudly.

“Huh?!”

“The red Magimatic Sol was burned away, but her race allowed her to survive!”

“Wait, she’s right... Erina’s a Vampire!” Raumunus of the Ash exclaimed happily.

Viridinus of the Emerald stirred. It was hard to tell, but the way she breathed out made it clear it was from joy. Erurenus of the Yellow, however, cackled loudly.

“Ahahaha! So Erina’s still alive! That’s good!”

It was a clearly superficial, hypocritical laughter. Compared to how she laughed during battle, any words of empathy for her comrades felt awfully fake.

Still, this was useful material for negotiation. The situation was heavily skewed in the Empire’s favor, and Diablo couldn’t confidently say he’d win a straight-up battle against three Magimatic Sols. Creating dissent among them might create an opening that would allow him to fire off a powerful spell.

“Tell me your true feelings! You do not actually want to fight, do you?!”

“Ahahaha! It’s true, I don’t want to fight! But when I get in this Magimatic Sol, my tail gets all tingly☆”

It seemed Erurenus of the Yellow — or rather its pilot — wasn’t going to listen to him. She claimed she didn’t want to fight, but let out clear bloodlust and enmity. She was drunk off of battle, but maybe there was a chance of convincing the ashen and green ones.

“Well, we...”

“Ugh...”

Diablo had hoped to buy time, but Doriadanph stopped their exchange with a shout.

“You dogs! You intend to defy *my* orders?! You can’t do that, and you know it!”

“Ngh...”

“Heee?! I’m sorry!”

“W-We know that already! Don’t shout at us, we’ll kill them soon enough! That’s what you want, right?!”

“Guhuhu... Don’t let a mere sorcerer give you trouble!”

The three Magimatic Sols turned their weapons on Diablo. He broke into a cold sweat. He’d failed to buy them any time.

“You’re scum...” He breathed out bitterly, fixing his gaze at Doriadanph. “You hold them captive with enslavement magic and hostages? Disgusting. Very

well... I shall use my greatest magic to put an end to you!”

“Ahahaha! Really?! This is gonna be fun!” Erurenus charged Diablo with manic laughter.

Diablo prepared himself and clenched his teeth bitterly... Normal magic wouldn't do enough here. But then...

“Kay!”

Behind Doriadanph, who had been watching over the fighting behind the Magimatic Sols, appeared a shadow.

†

Just when did she get there? It was as if she'd appeared from out of the shadows. The one who had snuck up on Doriadanph's large, corpulent back was none other than Horn.

“U-Ugh?!” Doriadanph groaned.

Horn stabbed her dagger into Doriadanph's back. Her teeth were clicking audibly from fear and suspense. This was probably the first time she'd really injured someone. Her face was even paler than Doriadanph's as his gaze slowly swerved toward her.



“You little piece of... traaaaaash...!” he bellowed, swinging down a clenched fist.

The intense backhand blow bashed Horn’s face and sent her flying backwards.

“Nngh?!” she moaned as the hit blew her away.

She wobbled to her feet, blood dripping from her nose, staining her clothes red. Doriadanph was supposed to be some kind of mage, but his body wasn’t just fat — he definitely had brute strength too.

“You thought you could kill me with that measly dagger?!” he howled at her.

“Uu, uuu...” Horn breathed out bitterly.

Doriadanph was bleeding from his flank, but it was by no means a fatal blow. A potion would easily heal that wound. But that did make something clear: Doriadanph was definitely susceptible to physical attacks. On the other hand, it turned out he was surprisingly sturdy, but his defense was much less than his magic resistance, which allowed him to shrug off a Cross Blizzard.

Still, he took an attack from a level 80 thief and even launched a counterattack!

He had the body of a warrior.

“You puny little girl! I’ll crush your limbs and toss you into a Magimatic Sol!”

“Agh, nng...” Horn wheezed.

“To think you would injure m—”

But then, Doriadanph trailed off, and his eyes darted around in a panic as his hands flew to his throat. His lips moved, but his voice wouldn’t come out. Horn wiped her nose, but it was probably broken, because the bleeding wouldn’t stop.

“The sorcerer-killing dagger! Cast Breaker!” she exclaimed in a muffled voice and raised her dagger.

It was the dagger she borrowed from Diablo’s vault earlier.

A poisonous dagger that paralyzed the tongue, its special effect was that it inflicted the silence status on the target for a set amount of time after dealing

damage. In the game, bashing mage characters down with physical attacks was a much more reliable way of defeating them than inflicting status ailments. To that end, Diablo treated it as a dud SSR.

But in this world, the silence status actually took away the victim's voice. This means Doriadanph couldn't give orders to his soldiers, or direct demands at the enslaved pilots. Doriadanph's lips flapped ardently — he was likely shouting — but no voice came out of his throat.

He gestured with his hands, as if demanding something from the onlooking soldiers standing outside the courtyard. Perhaps he was telling them to get him a potion for curing status ailments. With so many soldiers around, one of them must have had something.

But a stir seemed to move through the soldiers. Not one of them was willing to help him. Doriadanph was barking silent orders from the center of the courtyard, but all the soldiers did was stare at him. The three Magimatic Sols did the same.

"Haa... Nng... We've been ordered to kill you intruders. So we will!" Raumunus of the Ash whispered. "But for just a little... Bear with it!"

"Haa... Haa..."

The two of them tried resisting the orders of the enslavement magic placed on them, as did Toaha.

"What should we dooooo? I was looking forward to fighting this sorcerer, buuuut, the one I really wanna kill the most is that fat piiiig."

Even though she was a berserker addicted to combat, Toaha held a great grudge against Doriadanph.

"Nng, aah..." Horn wheezed as she held up her dagger. "I'll defeat him! I will!"

"Aaag, gaaah!"

Doriadanph cradled his injured flank as bloodlust overflowed from his body. It felt like they were facing an injured, enraged bear. But despite being a child, she was still a high-level thief. She wouldn't fall behind when it came to melee combat.

Still, Diablo wasn't going to simply stand back and watch. He plunged forward.

“《Sword Smite III》!”

He closed the distance in the blink of an eye, and at the same moment drew a longsword from his pouch. It was the 《Seraphix Sword》 he used for training purposes, but it was still more than enough to finish off this injured Magimatic mage.

Diablo further augmented the blow with Outer Glow. It was a technique he'd learned in the southern frontier of Caliture, and though he'd practiced using it many times on the way back to the capital, he hadn't quite mastered using it. That said, he didn't sit in the cart doing nothing the whole journey.

He mixed the martial arts he learned from the Swordmaster Sasara with the power of the Glow, which he'd learned from the Gadou school's assistant instructor, Solami.

“《Heat Sonic》!”

This martial art was unlocked by becoming a level 80 warrior. By level 120, one could unlock Heat Sonic II. While Diablo could only use its lower rank variant, it still dealt high damage. The longsword shone red with heat as Diablo raised it against Doriadanph.

Doriadanph noticed him, turning around to face him with a hand thrust forward. He was already covered in blood from his stab wound.

Did he use Magimatic sorcery?!

But while his lips moved, Doriadanph's voice wouldn't come out. Diablo didn't know how much in common *Cross Reverie's* sorcerers had with *Girls' Arms'* Magimatic mages, but apparently the latter had no spells they could cast while silenced. Nothing happened.

Diablo held his sword, glowing red with heat, in the air.

Am I going to kill someone again...?

“Kuh...!”

Diablo could see Horn at the edge of his vision, holding up her dagger. Behind him was Rose. Should he have let them do it... and not sully his hand?

If I do it, I know I'll always regret it...!

He had to push forward and do it. And in so doing, protect the things he held dear.

Diablo parted his lips, exclaiming for everyone to hear.

"I am Diablo! A Demon Lord from another world! All who defy me will regret their foolishness in the depths of hell!"

He unleashed his martial art, swinging his sword down on Doriadanph. And at that moment, eight consecutive slashes cut into Doriadanph's flesh at once. Blood gushed into the air as Doriadanph's eyes and mouth widened in a silent, inaudible scream.

†

Raumunus of the Ash's chestplate flew open, and a girl with short, gray hair popped out of it.

"Arooooooooooooo! We're freeeeeeeeeeee!"

She was tangled in a mess of tentacles and was mostly naked. She had dog ears, which made her look like a dwarf, but her limbs were muscular and well-formed. A werewolf.

"Kyahahahaha!" Erurenus of the Yellow let out a high-pitched cackle. "He's dead! Dropped dead! Finally, deadead!"

It laughed, swinging the swords in both its hands around manically. But surprisingly, the one to show the most emotion was the otherwise curt pilot of Viridinus of the Emerald, Saya.

"Aaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaah!" she bellowed, swinging around her mallet.

"Ugh?!" Diablo grabbed hold of Horn and jumped away.

"Ah!" Horn let out a shriek.

"Aaaah!" Saya kept screaming, and swung down Viridinus' mallet on Doriadanph's body with thuds that shook the floor.

Mashed flesh scattered. It was apparent that she didn't do this for caution's

sake or as a finishing blow. She swung her mallet down time and again, landing one rumbling blow after another.

“Ah! Ah! Ah! Ah! Ah! Ah! Die! Die! You’re putrid! Die! Disgusting! Gross! Diediediediediediediedie!”

Diablo could hear the distinct crunching sound of metal creaking and cracking. The joints on the Magimatic Sol’s arm fell apart, squirting out splashes of oil. The mallet snapped and crumbled.

“Aaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaah!” Saya gave one final howl, which gradually broke apart and turned to sobbing.

Diablo had no way of knowing what she’d been through. But whatever it was, her grudge and resentment were palpable. Diablo could hardly recall seeing someone express so much intense hatred.

Someone forced their way through the rows of Imperial soldiers and ran toward them. A silver-haired Kobold girl. She carried a single-edged blade on her waist, but kept her sword sheathed. She didn’t seem to have any will to fight.

“Saya!” she shouted at Viridinus of the Emerald. “Disembark! Open the hatch, hurry! Now isn’t the time to be crying!”

“Aaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaah!” Saya kept screaming uncontrollably.

“Lady Aira?” The werewolf girl showing her face out of Raumunus of the Ash whispered.

“Bakki, Toaha, you two disembark too!”

“Huh? What are you saying, Aira?” Erurenus of the Yellow asked, as if quizzical. “We’re finally free. We can fight freely now.”

Erurenus’ pilot was still full of bloodlust. No, if anything, she was even more combative than before. Diablo steeled himself. The enslavement magic should have been gone. If nothing else, the order to ‘kill the intruders’ should have been invalidated by Doriadanph’s death.

But the fact remained that Diablo killed Rikka — their comrade. So if they

were to say they wanted to take revenge on him for that...

“Calm down, Toaha!” the Kobold girl, Aira, shouted. “Bakki, help Saya disembark! You can open Viridinus’ hatch with your claws, right?”

“Huh? I, err, I could, but...”

†

More and more people filed into the courtyard.

“Diablo!” A familiar voice called out, prompting Diablo to turn around.

It was Rem, Shera, and Sylvie. They were looking down at them from a balcony overlooking the courtyard. Diablo breathed a sigh of relief.

They’re safe...

“My Lord, thank you for granting your blessing and mercy upon us...” Lumachina, who had apparently been dreading what might happen to them, thanked God for their safety.

“Huh? Wait, isn’t there someone with them?” Horn asked, tilting her head in surprise.

Upon closer inspection, there was someone else there, coiled up in vines, which was probably Sylvie’s handiwork.

A prisoner?

It was a purple-haired girl with a horn growing out of her forehead. An Oni.

Is that a Magimatic Sol pilot?

The thought of Rem and the others fighting a Magimatic Sol filled Diablo with dread. But they seemed to have defeated their opponent, which was reassuring. At Aira’s insistence, Erurenus of the Yellow finally opened its hatch, revealing a Lamia girl submerged within its tentacled confines — Toaha.

She didn’t disembark the unit though, seemingly displeased. Saya was still sobbing uncontrollably like an infant. Raumunus of the Ash used its massive claws to pry Viridinus’ hatch open, but was apparently struggling to do so.

“Just come on out of there already!”

“Aaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaah!” Saya didn’t stop weeping.

The girl who gave the three their orders, Aira, stood in front of Diablo. She was clad in the Imperial army’s uniform. Multiple badges were attached to the breast of her coat, but Diablo didn’t know what any of them meant. He assumed she was quite high-ranking, however. If nothing else, she had a higher position than the other pilots.

She was a silver-haired Kobold, which struck Diablo as unusual. From what Diablo could tell, all the Magimatic Sol pilots had hair that matched their unit’s color. Unless they dyed it intentionally, that might have been a precondition for being compatible... Or maybe it was proof of their compatibility, instead.

“The Gelmed Empire’s armed forces captain, Aira Arjana.” She saluted, introducing herself. “Though I suppose this rank will soon be meaningless...”

“Hmph... With your commander and Magimatic Sols gone, your invasion army will soon be ruined.”

“That’s part of what I mean, but... The Gelmed Empire does not forgive deserters. I... don’t think we have anywhere left to go anymore.”

But just as she finished those words, the ground shook. It wasn’t just Diablo, Aira and everyone else looked around in confusion.

An earthquake?

If that was the case, it was a major earthquake at that. The building shook and Castle Grandiose’s spires slanted out of position.

“What is this?! This isn’t an earthquake, this is...!”

This wasn’t the rumblings of a large echo or some kind of explosion either. It was close to the rolling of thunder, but much heavier.

“No...” Aira turned pale. “This is too soon...”

“Mm? You know what’s behind this shaking?!” Diablo asked.

Beads of cold sweat rolled down her forehead, and her expression was stiff with terror.

“It’s... footsteps.”

Chapter 4: Magimatic Castle Viovix

Diablo didn't immediately understand what Aira meant. This rumbling, that felt like rolling thunder, like an earthquake, was actually footsteps? Was this some kind of metaphor? Diablo thought to demand an explanation, but then he saw something impossible in the edge of his field of vision.

A castle, floating in the sky.

"...What...?"

"What's that?!" Horn asked, pointing up at it.

Outside, beyond the castle's spires, a black shadow floated in the heavens. Its silhouette definitely was that of a castle. Structures seemed to extend in all directions from within the castle. It was too big for Diablo to fully perceive its full size.

Diablo had only experienced something like this once before, back when he was playing the game. There was a special story involving a Legend Dragon. The players would arrive on a deserted island, and the twist was that the island's surface itself was actually the Dragon's back. It was a special boss battle in the game where one needed to keep their balance while fighting the dragon at the same time.

But this world had no concept of balance adjustment. And if that castle in the sky belonged to the Empire of Gelmed, it was an enemy they must defeat.

"Hey! Is that an Imperial castle?! Answer me!" Diablo pressed on Aira.

"...Yes. That castle belongs to Emperor Gelmed. The Magimatic Castle, Viovix."

A Magimatic Castle?

Looking at it again, Diablo noticed the structures expanding from the castle were moving ever so slowly. They were as large as the ridges of a mountain, and moved as they tore into the clouds.

“Are those... legs?”

Those legs were as large as walls, but they had to be to support the castle’s considerable weight. The legs rose slowly, and with each time they landed back on the ground, they caused a massive tremor.

Aira was right. These were footsteps.

“...A fearsome presence is hanging over this place,” Lumachina said fearfully.

“Mm?”

Diablo couldn’t sense any mana in the vicinity, but... Looking up, he did see dark clouds brewing. He remembered this. During the last battle, magic was used to project an image into the clouds. Once again, the image of a wrinkled old man surfaced in the sky.

“Ooooh...”

A rumbling moaning could be heard from above.

“E-Emperor... Gelmed...” Aira flinched.

So that was the Emperor, after all...

“Ooooh... The Girl of the Vessel...!”

The image turned solid. Like a flying 3D image, the Emperor’s face swooped down on them. And below the Emperor’s face was what looked like a black serpent’s torso. Diablo thought it was just an image, but Aira moaned in fear.

“Emperor Gelmed sent a Shadow after us already...?!”

Diablo didn’t know any method of transforming into anything like that or any monster like it.

Is this some kind of magic?!

“Lord Diablo!” Lumachina raised her voice with uncharacteristic harshness.

“You mustn’t look away from that!”

“I know!”

He actually didn’t know at all. Up until now, the things he knew from *Cross Reverie* seemed to apply in this world, and because of that, when Diablo was

faced with an unfamiliar enemy he always had to stop and observe it. But doing that now could be a fatal mistake, it seemed.

It didn't matter what shape or form it took. That thing was an enemy.

Emperor Gelmed's objective was the Girl of the Vessel — Rem. He couldn't allow it to get near her.

“《Lightning Storm》!” Diablo fired a spell.

It was an offensive spell that was perfectly capable of damaging a Magimatic Sol, a level 140 light and wind element spell. It created a tornado that blocked the enemy's movements while attacking it with bolts of lightning.

“Ooooooooooooooooooh...?!”

The black serpentine Emperor, the Shadow, dispersed like a puff of smoke. Diablo remained cautious, however. Having fought countless unfamiliar opponents, Diablo gained an odd, almost additional sense. It was similar to what swordsmen called 'a response,' the feeling that you've successfully landed a blow.

Magic normally wouldn't have anything like that, and if this was the game, the victory fanfare would jingle as a popup appeared informing the player of the EXP and item drops they'd gained. But this world had nothing of the sort. Was he to assume he'd defeated his opponent just because they were gone?

No, they're still here!

His intuition warned him, and sure enough, within moments the dispersed smoke reconverged. The Shadow was recovering, and looked completely unharmed. Diablo clicked his tongue.

I can't believe it. I misjudged its elemental affinity?! Or was my spell lacking in firepower?!

All the opponents he'd fought so far seemed to have been at least somewhat susceptible to magic. But Gelmed's people seemed to simply shrug it off. Was it just that the logic they operated on was too different?

“Kuh... 《Buster Napalm》!”

He fired a highly powerful fire element spell that had a long windup time. The

Shadow's tail was so long that its movements were relatively slow. A massive blast boomed above it, staggering the Imperial soldiers with its sheer force. Some of them screamed in shock, and Aira shielded her head with both arms.

"Ah, this is... incredible... Is this really Human sorcery?!" she asked in shock.

"How do you like that?!" Diablo exclaimed.

Emperor Gelmed disappeared, but within moments, the smoke-like Shadow reconverged like a cloud of angry flies and approached the balcony Rem and the others were in. Diablo had no more powerful spells to shoot, and any attack he unleashed would also hit the girls.

"How can this be...?!"

Never before had his magic been this ineffective.

†

"Take a 《Triangle Shot》!" Shera shot an arrow.

But even high level magic couldn't push the Shadow away, so her attack disturbed it no more than a light breeze. The most her arrow could do was make its form waver ever so slightly. The Shadow had a black serpent's body and the old man's face, its expression contorted in glee.

"Ooooh! There can be no mistaking it! It is her!" he exclaimed, his eyes fixed on Rem.

"No, it didn't work!" Shera said, faltering back.

"Kuh..." Rem clicked her tongue.

"I'm sorry, Rem!"

"...It's too soon to give up," Rem said, taking a deep breath.

The Glow built up in her body. Emperor Gelmed drew closer, the old man's face at the end of the Shadow's elongated torso bellowing out, "Ooooooh! There can be no mistaking it! The Girl of the Vessel! Accept me! Conceive me, give birth to me, grant me new life! If you do, I shall make you into the holy mother!"

"Disgusting!" Rem rejected his words with all her vehemence.

“Ngaaaaaaaaaaaaah!” the Shadow howled, opening its mouth wide enough to swallow a person whole.

Rem held her right fist at her waist, then thrust it forward.

“《Shimmering Wave》!”

This was a finishing technique used by Rem’s aunt, Solami. The wave of energy blew the old man’s face away.

“You did it!” Shera pumped her fist in joy.

But Rem clenched her teeth bitterly. The Shadow once again resumed its form.

“Aaaaaaaaaaaaaah! The Girl of the Vessel! I shan’t let anyone else have you! Become my mother!”

“I refuse!” Rem said sharply as she took a step back.

Diablo’s magic, Shera’s demonic bow, and even Rem’s trump card did nothing to affect the Shadow.

How do we defeat this thing?!

But just as Diablo asked himself that, Sylvie slapped her hands on the balcony’s handrail.

“I made it!”

She stuck out her right hand and twirled her wrist. A shining magic circle spread out on part of the rail — Circle-type Sorcery.

“Hey, Emperor Gelmed! Being old isn’t all that bad, you know! Though I guess that wouldn’t sound too convincing coming from a Grasswalker!”

“You?!”

For the first time, the Shadow’s attention turned away from Rem. As the magic circle spread, Sylvie drew a shining line with a finger, and then slapped her hands together.

“Three Black, White Two! Surround us and close, 《Unlimited Bowl》!”

A shining sphere spread out around her, and then covered Rem’s body.

“What?!” Rem asked, her eyes wide in surprise.

“Just hang tight for a while!”

“What is this?! Isn’t this spell for capturing enemies?!” Diablo asked, shocked.

“My expertise is support magic,” Sylvie shrugged. “And if the enemy’s too high level, they can resist it. But I can use powerful magic on my willing allies!”

“...And that’s why you trapped me inside here?” Rem asked.

“You can rest easy, Rem, no one can touch you in there!” Sylvie said reassuringly.

The Shadow closed in on Rem, but it was indeed deflected away by the sphere. Sparks flew as it was sent flying back before reforming.

“Someone dares oppose me?! Oppose the Emperor of the Gelmed Empire?!”

“Of course!” Sylvie said smugly.

“I am the Emperor of the Gelmed Empire! A living god who reigns over all in existence! Insolent fool!”

“Err...” Sylvie seemed to wince at his indignation. “I’m just buying time with my magic! So, Diablo, you handle the rest!”

Diablo nodded back. He used flight magic to hover near the balcony and spoke to the Shadow, putting forth his most imposing Demon Lord performance.

“You say you rule over all of existence? That’s quite the cheeky thing to say in the face of a Demon Lord! And for how self-important you are, all you do is chase around one poor girl... Know some shame!”

The Shadow did not respond, however. It didn’t even regard Diablo, and kept bellowing.

“By the rules of this world, all must obey me, all must heed me, and all must gladly die in my name! All shall thank me for being permitted to live by my benevolence! Worship me! Praise me! Extol me!”

Diablo had been utterly ignored. This was the first time Diablo had been completely ignored by someone since coming to this world.

It's probably because my magic didn't work... He's ignoring me because I'm weak!

Anger swirled in the pit of Diablo's stomach, but his heart soon turned cold. It'd been so long since he'd last been ignored, but he was used to this. He was so familiar with this feeling that it almost felt nostalgic. And as pathetic and absurd as it was... Being ignored made him remember the past, cooling his thoughts.

Before he even realized it, laughter spilled from his lips.

"Heheh... Heheheh... Of course. This is only natural..."

What the hell have I been doing? Firing powerful spells blindly is completely lacking in elegance. When did I become such a predictable, one-trick-pony?

Was it because all his opponents recently were ones that required him to push through them with sheer firepower? Because they were all opponents he'd faced in the game before? Where the slightest bit of sophistication was all it took to beat them?

True, he couldn't recall fighting a battle where his magic was so ineffective, but in the past, Diablo would say this to his foes: "You're weak because you don't fight like you're hanging by the skin of your teeth."

How many powerful opponents had he faced since coming to this world, really? There were times when he struggled, true, but it was so much less often than back when he was a socially crippled gamer.

This is pathetic... I've grown dull.

"Heheh..." Diablo chuckled, feeling like he was finally awake. "I've kept you bored, haven't I, Emperor Gelmed...? As my apology, I shall show you a Demon Lord's true power!"

But again, the Emperor showed no response to Diablo.

Then let's make you acknowledge me!

"《Ice Age》!"

A level 130 water element spell that inhibited the target's movements for a brief moment. But the Shadow's face seemed disinterested, as if to say, 'So

what?’ The tip of Diablo’s shadow touched the frozen Shadow — the spell had hit its mark, and using omission, Diablo swiftly performed his next spell.

“《Naraku》!”

“Ng?!”

And for the first time, Emperor Gelmed turned to look at him. The effects of Ice Age wore off, and the frost melted off Emperor Gelmed’s face.

“You...!”

“Hmph... If you can regenerate from any powerful spell, then I shall expunge you from this world altogether. Drift in the void for all eternity!”

Diablo didn’t actually know if this spell threw its victims into a void, that was just the lore behind the spell. A small hole formed and began drawing in the Shadow. Apparently, he couldn’t resist this spell.

“Aagh...!” Emperor Gelmed let out a peculiar screech. “You fool...! You cretin! I am the Emperor of Gelmed! This is blasphemy! Impiety! Ggghah, aaaaah...!”

And screaming still, he sunk into the hole. Once the spell triggered, its effects happened all too quickly.

Did I beat him...?

Diablo couldn’t feel any response, but the Shadow was gone. The oppressive feeling hung in the air just the same, though. Diablo glared up into the sky — at the Magimatic Castle Viovix.

†

A raspy voice spoke down to them from the sky again.

“Such impiety... To bare fangs against me... The sovereign and ruler... You shall regret this...”

The old man’s wrinkled face once again appeared in the sky. Diablo’s lips curled upwards.

“Hmph! Know when to give up, fool. I shall defeat you again and again!”

But that said, Diablo didn’t have any more tricks up his sleeve. Apparently the Human-headed serpent from earlier wasn’t the Emperor’s main body. It was a

difficult opponent to defeat, but the Emperor himself hadn't sustained any damage. It was similar to a Summon Beast in that regard.

"Magimatic Sols! Return to VioviX!" the Emperor ordered.

The order echoed throughout the capital, and then, the sound of building crumbling began to echo around them.

"What?!"

Not just Diablo and his group, but even the Imperial soldiers all looked around in confusion. A new Magimatic Sol appeared from some distance away from the courtyard, flying in and destroying the rooftops of the capital's buildings in the process.

There was still an undamaged Magimatic Sol lying around?!

It was a golden color.

"That's impossible... Goldinus of the Gold?!" Aira exclaimed, her voice strained.

For a second, Diablo felt its gaze focus on them... The Magimatic Sol called Goldinus of the Gold flew toward the Magimatic Castle VioviX with lightning speed. Diablo kept his expression hardened and resolute, but he was panicking on the inside. Fighting the other Magimatic Sols was challenging, so the idea of there being one who clearly seemed stronger than the rest was a startling one.

"Bakki, hurry! Toaha, you disembark, too!"

It was then when the sound of metal bending filled Diablo's ears. Raumunus of the Ash's claws finally tore Viridinus of the Emerald's hatch open.

"I made it!"

"Haa... Haa... Haa... Haa... Haa..."

The pilot wore an expression like she'd finally snapped out of her madness and realized the situation she was in. Bakki hopped out of Raumunus and pulled the Nekomata girl — Saya — from the emerald Magimatic Sol. Her limbs were slender and dainty, and her build was like a child's. Diablo wasn't familiar with therianthropes all that well, so he couldn't really judge her age based off of her appearance.

But Toaha, the pilot of Erurenus of the Yellow, still refused to disembark.

“Ahaha... Go back? *Go back*? Why? I still haven’t fought enough. They all keep saying, go back, take a rest... Stupid ordeeeeeeeers!”

Erurenus turned around, leaving just its head turned toward them.

“Shut up already, Aira. There’s no more enslavement magic. I don’t obey anyone’s orders now, and I’m going to fight all I want.”

“You have to disembark the Magimatic Sol, Toaha. This is... His Majesty...”

“Disembark?! This thing is me. It’s who I am. I don’t need to get outside or rest... I feel my best inside here. I feel calm.”

“No, you don’t understand!” Aira raised her voice desperately. “This thing is a monster that obeys His Majesty’s will! You have to disembark, right now!”

“Magimatic Sols, return to the castle!” the Emperor’s voice boomed once again.

Toaha had no intention of obeying anyone’s words anymore, though.

“Aaaaaaah! Shut up, shut up! Stop ordering me aroooooooooound!”

“...So you were defective,” the Emperor’s voice declared coldly.

“Huh?! ”

A gut-wrenching crunching sound echoed from within Erurenus. The sound of chewing.

Crunch, crunch, crunch...

“Aah, ouch! Why?! Wh-Why... Why is... Why is Erurenus eating meeeeeeee...?!”

Aira clenched her teeth bitterly. Bakki was screaming incoherently at the sight while Saya let out a shrill, sorrowful shriek. Toaha’s screams echoed from within Erurenus, eerily filling the courtyard.

“Aaaaaaaaaaah! It’s eating me! It’s eating me! It’s eating meeeeeeeeeeeeeeeee! Why?! Whyyyyy?! Aaaaaaaaaah...”

Her voice grew fainter, and eventually, Erurenus stood still and motionless.

Toaha's voice — even her breathing — were no longer audible.

It ate her?! The Magimatic Sol ate its own pilot, killed her?!

Diablo didn't even have a chance to help her.

"This is... What is this?! What is that thing?!" Diablo forgot his Demon Lord role play and exclaimed, feeling a cold shiver run down his spine.

Magimatic Sols ate pilots that weren't compatible with them, and despite looking like a machine, it was some kind of tentacle monster on the inside.

What are these tentacles anyway?!

"That's... the contents of the Magimatic Sol, it's..." Aira stammered.

"You know what that thing is?!"

"Doriadanph said it's... part of Emperor Gelmed's body..."

"Wh-What?!" Diablo asked in a shrill voice.

Up until now, Diablo thought the face he saw in the sky was Emperor Gelmed. An old man of the races who had control over a large Empire. Diablo assumed he might be a powerful magician, at best.

The Magimatic Sol's contents... are part of the Emperor's body?! He's a tentacle monster, not one of the races?! That's absurd! He's more of a monster than any Demon Lord! I'm up against something much more evil than I had ever thought!

"Bring forth... the Girl of the Vessel," Emperor Gelmed's voice boomed around them. "Do so, and you shall be forgiven..."

He said this after using part of his body to devour Toaha alive. The sheer arrogance, the utter monstrosity of this creature.

But how do I fight this thing...? Diablo racked his brain desperately.

The Emperor was probably somewhere inside that castle, and it was gigantic... No, gigantic wasn't strong enough of a word to describe its size. He appeared by way of a projection in the sky, but scattering that would achieve nothing.

Could magic even oppose an enemy of that caliber?

But if Diablo were to do nothing, the Emperor would certainly send in his subordinates and make use of Magimatic technology to go after Rem.

Diablo clenched his teeth.

*I call myself a Demon Lord and then let an opponent unnerve me this much?!
If I'm acting this role, I'm going to stick to it until the very end!*

†

Diablo thrust his staff in the direction of the Magimatic Castle Viovix.

“Emperor Gelmed! I am Diablo, a Demon Lord from another world! You have set foot upon this land and sown chaos without my permission! Prepare yourself, for I will bring upon you an end which is as horrifying as you are impudent!”

How far was the castle, though? It was so large Diablo couldn't help but feel anxious. It felt like it was close, but it also looked like it was very far away from the capital.

Isn't it a little too far...?

Diablo spoke despite his fears, and if he didn't use some kind of magic after telling his opponent to 'prepare himself,' it would seem terribly lame. So he had to fire something... regardless of the effect.

“Glacies Cannon!”

Diablo fired a massive lump of ice from the tip of his wand. This high-level water element spell once blasted a hole into one of Castle Grandiose's walls, effectively increasing the number of windows. How would it fare against the Gelmed Empire's castle, then?

Diablo's eyes were fixed on the lump of ice. So were those of Rem's group, Aira, and even the Gelmed soldiers, each watching it soar. And then...

The castle shined, and for a single moment, a sphere of light covered the Magimatic Castle Viovix. The moment it made contact with the sphere, the Glacies Cannon shattered. The next moment, a booming blast shook the air.

The spell just barely reached the castle. For how massive it was, it took time for the attack to connect. But Diablo recognized that shining sphere which

surrounded the castle.

“A Fallen-repelling barrier...!”

It was likely the same as the one used in Faltra, a barrier for disarming the Fallen and magic. Of course, it could have been structured differently from the one Diablo knew. In Faltra, the towers standing along the walls formed the barrier. Viovix didn't seem to have anything analogous to that.

This, of course, meant the spell didn't actually deal any damage to the castle, despite hitting it. The face of the old man floating in the sky didn't change in the slightest. He didn't assume a single Glacies Cannon was going to make that major of a difference.

Diablo felt a chill run through his body.

“Bring forth... the Girl of the Vessel...” the Emperor repeated his words.

“Stop repeating yourself, fool! You will not have your way! As a true Demon Lord, I will...!”

“Do so, and you shall be forgiven...”

The Imperial soldiers all pointed at something, and Lumachina raised her voice in fear.

“S-Something... I feel something malevolent in the air...!”

A sphere of light shot up into the sky from one of Viovix's spires. Even without the High Priest's warning, Diablo's intuition warned him.

This thing is dangerous.

But if it's magic...

Diablo looked down at his left hand. Sitting on his ring finger was the Demon Lord's Ring, capable of deflecting any and all magic.

“This could do it...” he muttered to himself.

The sphere of light began falling down... But it wasn't falling toward them. It wasn't headed for the castle's courtyard, where Diablo and his group were.

It's... north of the castle? A bit to the east... Anyway, it's far from here.

It would likely land not in the central district, where the castle was, but in the first district. It reminded Diablo of something, though. It looked small from afar, but the sphere of light was likely larger than a building...

“It can’t be...!” Diablo’s eyes widened.

The sphere approached the ground ever so slowly.

“Don’t look at it!” Diablo shouted. “Get doooooooooooooown!”

But before he could finish his warning, a blinding flash washed over the capital. The world was whited out for one long moment. The rumbling sound that followed completely deafened out any other sound.

Yes, Diablo knew what that sphere was. It was 《White Nova》. And unlike the one he used, it wasn’t a small scale one. It was dozens... no, hundreds of times larger than the spell he used. Would the destruction extend this far? Would Rem and the others be safe, then?

Diablo reached out his hand. At that point, the blast had reached them. There was no way he would make it.

“Reeem! Sheraaa!” he shouted.

But the rumbling explosion completely drowned out his voice. Then the light died down. The flash disappeared, as if being absorbed into the sky, and the thundering sound of the blast petered out. The powerful impact that felt like it might white out the world became silent as if it had never been there to begin with.

We’re safe. Me, everyone else...

Viovi’s attack didn’t seem to reach the courtyard Diablo’s group occupied. Did he miss? No, that couldn’t have been it. It was because Rem, the Girl of the Vessel, was here. The Emperor couldn’t have risked losing her.

Diablo gasped heavily as he felt thick beads of sweat drip from his forehead.

The bad feeling was far from gone. Lumachina fell to her knees, hugging her own shoulders. She probably realized what had happened already. Diablo used flight magic, and floating up, he reached higher than the castle’s walls and looked at where the sphere had impacted.

The first district was gone.

“Aah...?!”

Diablo realized what it felt like to have every hair on one’s body stand on end. This was *terror*. His body shivered, overcome by more fear than he’d ever felt before. It was all gone. The once circular surface of the first district had been reduced to a water canal in the shape of the crescent moon. The buildings on what little land was left of it were completely knocked down and blown away.

And what of the people? The first district was occupied by the Empire during yesterday’s battle. The enemy army had retreated from it later on, but the Church’s soldiers didn’t have the manpower to push the front back and retake it. So there was hardly anyone left there...

...Or so Diablo hoped.

There might have been wounded soldiers that were left behind, or citizens in hiding. And anyone who might have been there... was gone. No one could have hoped to survive a blast that wiped out the entirety of the land like that.

“Kuh... That bastard... He wiped out... an entire town...!” Diablo grumbled angrily, looking up at the image of the old man projected in the sky.

“Bring forth... the Girl of the Vessel... Until you do... I will destroy a Human town... every sunset...” the Emperor spoke.

For the first time in his life, Diablo truly and utterly feared an opponent.

Chapter 5: Trying to Convince People

That night, Horn was in the Inner Sanctum's observatory. In her hand was the Holy Grail, and within it sat Babalon, a goddess only she could see. Babalon was palmtop-sized and dressed in a peculiar outfit, but no one else could see or hear her. Only the owner of the Holy Grail, now Horn, could communicate with her.

"Haaaaa. This situation is really messed up..."

"Talk about a miss~ If you had killed the enemy country's commander, you woulda like, leveled up a whole ton. Y'know? Diablo boy totally stole your kill. It totes sucks~"

Babalon had a tendency of speaking with some strange dialect Horn didn't really understand. She could only pick up on the gist of what Babalon was saying at any given time. Babalon introduced herself as a Goddess from another world, so maybe it was what was spoken there.

"I think the Boss wanted to..."

"Yeah, yeah, I getcha~ ♪ He didn't want to let you become a murderer. But if that was true, why let you go to the battlefield anyway, y'know?"

"I just wasn't ready for this..." Horn shook her head.

"Kyahaha... Totally! Like, why didn't you finish him off? It's my first time having an owner like you, lmao."

"Really?"

"I mean, people offer blood to the Holy Grail to level up, y'know? They like, murder people. Seeing someone hesitate to kill is like, not something that happens with me!"

"Nng..."

Compared to past users of the Holy Grail, Horn was lacking in resolve. And she was probably just as lacking in skill. She only borrowed the Grail from Diablo's treasure vault because she happened to see it... and needed something to serve

as a makeshift toilet.

“So like, where’s Diablo boy?”

“He said he was tired so he was going to sleep in his room... But he’s probably in shock. Ah, Rem and Shera went to sleep in their room, too.”

Rose had gone to Diablo’s room. The only one left in the observatory was Sylvie. She was quite fatigued, too, and was napping. Lumachina had gone with the Paladins and high ranking priests to the prayer room. Apparently, they were trying to come up with some countermeasure against the Magimatic Castle Viovix.

Horn couldn’t help but feel like their discussion would be fruitless, though. How do you oppose something like that castle...?

“Hornie, you should totally, like, turn that frown upside down. Your face could get stuck that way.”

“And that’d be *totes* bad, right...?” Horn asked sarcastically.

“No! Times like this you gotta, like, be hyper! Stay positive and all that!”

“I don’t understand a word you’re saying...”

“Let’s amp up the music♪ Woo♪”

Booming music started playing inside Horn’s head.

“Huh? Why am I hearing music?! How did you do that?!” Horn looked at her with round eyes.

“Heheh!” Babalon said smugly. *“I’m like, a goddess, y’know? Playing my favorite tunes is like, piece of cake for me.”*

“What is this weird music?! It’s too loud! I can’t think like this!”

“...Hey, Hornie! You got a problem with my tunes?! Huh?! If you can’t tell how good this music is, it’s because your ears are full of crap! Ah, I’ll clean them out with this dagger.”

For how small she was, Babalon was apparently pretty strong and could pick up Horn’s dagger from the floor with both hands. She even aptly pulled it out of its sheath.

“H-Hey, that’s my poison dagger! Y-You can’t use that!”

“Imma shut you up! Silence, you!”

“Hii?!”

But the next moment, Horn was jolted by the sound of military boots clicking against the floor. The Paladin Tria suddenly appeared before her. She was a strait-laced, pious woman who had sworn fealty to Lumachina.

“What is all this racket?! Don’t you know how late it is?” Tria asked grimly.

“Ugh... Sorry...” Horn mumbled awkwardly.

“She got mad at youuuuu! Ahahahaha!” Babalon rolled around, laughing and grabbing her sides.

Tria looked down at the floor, her eyes narrowed. The drawn dagger was lying there.

“...I understand how you feel, but restrain yourself. These aren’t opponents you could have beaten on your own,” she said.

“Huh? N-No, I...”

How was she supposed to interpret this? Horn didn’t think she could deal with that situation all on her own. She picked up the dagger, put it back in its sheath, and put it into her bag.

“I’ve heard of you from Her Grace,” Tria said thankfully. “She said that the defeat of the enemy commander Doriadanph was mostly thanks to your efforts.”

“Ah?! Oh, erm, aah... I guess you could say that, but not really...”

“Truth be told, I was opposed to including you in the strike force.”

“Ah...”

“As limited as my skills may be, I am still a Paladin. I believed that wherever Her Grace goes, I must follow as her guardian.”

“...Yes.”

“And yet, you have distinguished yourself and contributed to the battle. I

likely would not have been able to do that. Using poison is forbidden by the Church, after all... But in truth, that doesn't really matter. You present yourself as a weak child, but the truth is you are a young woman of distinction and strength. I must admit I am ashamed of my ignorance."

"Kahahaha! But you're actually like, super weak!"

"Right... I mean, no!" Horn corrected herself, remembering only she could hear Babalon. "I'm not distinguished or strong!"

Responding to Babalon's teasing made her response come out wrong. She would have to be conscious of replying to Babalon.

"We've received word just now that the Imperial soldiers occupying the castle have surrendered," Tria told her.

"...Huh?"

"The Imperial invasion force has lost its commander, and it seems Emperor Gelmed is ignoring them. He isn't replying to any of their attempts to make contact."

"What?! That's horrible!"

"They're currently being unified under Corps Commander Aira Arjana. You've met her, yes?"

"I... know what she looks like, yeah..."

When she left the castle's courtyard, Aira had stood straight and saluted at her.

"Didn't she, like, tell you something?" Babalon asked.

"...She said, 'We all owe you for our freedom.'"

"I agree with what she said," Tria nodded. "Lady Aira has supplied us with information regarding the Magimatic Sols' workshop."

"Their workshop?"

"And she also told us of Alicia Cristela's current whereabouts."

"Really?!" Horn raised her voice so suddenly that Babalon fell off her seat on the Holy Grail's rim.

Tria raised a hand, signaling Horn to keep her voice down.

“She was forced to board a Magimatic Sol called 《Goldinus of the Gold》. Apparently, she is compatible with it. I do not know the details, but it seems she has some sort of rare, unusual talent.”

“I don’t really know about any talent, but...” Horn frowned.

Apparently, the interior of the Magimatic Sol was part of Emperor Gelmed. Opposing him would result in the pilot being devoured. She’d never seen her, but Toaha’s final scream was still fresh in Horn’s memories.

If she’s inside that thing, do we even have any hope of saving her...?

“Oh, right, I saw a golden Magimatic Sol fly to Viovix. That could have been Goldinus.”

“There’s a good chance Miss Alicia is in a state where she can’t resist their orders.”

“Yeah, probably.”

Alicia was actually a Demon Lord worshiper, and hated the Kingdom of Lyferia from the bottom of her heart. There was the possibility she defected to the Empire. But still, Horn wanted to believe in her. She was only captured because she tried to save Rem’s life, after all.

“I understand that you acknowledge me, but why are you giving me all this information?” Horn asked.

“Her Grace held a council with the priests regarding Viovix...” Tria said with a mixed expression.

“Right.”

“And the conclusion they came to is that we have no way of dealing with it. All we can do is pray.”

Horn fell silent.

“Ahaha, I totally could have told them that before they even had their stupid meeting!” Babalon cackled, pointing at Tria mockingly.

Horn flipped the Holy Grail, placing it with its mouth against the ground.

“Mmmmf?!”

Ignoring Babalon’s muffled complaints, Horn started thinking. The Church’s soldiers had no way of resisting that castle. In which case, the only reason they’d give Horn information despite that...

“...You’re hoping the Boss can handle it.”

“Right. As pitiful as it is... We can only rely on the Paladin Captain. If nothing else, Her Grace has no intention of handing Miss Rem over to the enemy.”

“Of course not!”

“Don’t worry. Everyone is in agreement with regards to that. That man destroyed a town altogether as a threat with little to no discussion... How are we to trust him?”

“We can’t!”

“We’ve also heard that lands occupied by the Gelmed Empire were subjected to terrible treatment. In which case, we can’t know that Her Grace’s safety is guaranteed. We must avoid surrendering to the Empire at all costs.”

Babalon appeared on top of the flipped Holy Grail at some point, lying languidly as if exhausted.

“Kill anyone who resists. Gradually kill anyone who obeys. Peeps like that are pretty common...”

“I’ll let the Boss know,” Horn nodded.

“Please do,” Tria said.

But did Diablo even know what to do about this...?

Horn saw it. The barrier on the castle deflected Diablo’s magic. It was the same as the barrier around Faltra. And the attack Emperor Gelmed launched was probably some kind of magic too, but one of never-before-seen magnitude and power. Having studied the basics of magic made Horn all too aware of how irrationally powerful the Magimatic Castle Viovix was.

“I’m sure the Boss will come up with something!” Horn exclaimed, as if to cheer herself up.

In a forest, some distance away from Castle Sevenwall...

Normally, at this time of night, the forest would be filled with the chirping of birds and insects. But at this moment, a sense of pressure hung over the area, silencing everything inside. It felt as if even the trees were holding their breath.

Hidden between the trees of this forest were the minister, Noah Gibun, and her Order of Palace Knights. But of course, with the King of Lyferia dead and the castle in enemy hands, it was doubtful if anyone even acknowledged the existence or authority of the Order of Palace Knights.

"It looks like the first district was wiped out," Noah said, moving her eyes away from the binoculars.

Alan, the Dwarven boy, gave a whistle, as if impressed. Maximum Abrams, the captain of the order, punched him over his spikey, silver-haired head.

"We're in the middle of a covert operation," he chided Alan.

"C'mon, no one knows we're here! Besides, Captain, why are we hiding? Let's charge them! We can beat the Gelmed Empire, right?!"

Maximum pressed a finger against his own forehead. Recent events had plagued him with migraines. The same could be said for Noah.

"Alan? If you're going to be noisy, I'll have to send you back to the carriage," Noah warned him.

"C'mon, if we're scouting, I could charge in and run wild for a bit! Whaddaya say?"

...He actually would do it, Noah thought to herself dryly and sighed.

Maximum clenched his fist, preparing to land a second iron blow over Alan's head, but Noah raised her hand to stop him.

"...I guess now's as good of a time as any. We've spent days simply watching over the situation. It's about time I explained everything to you."

Noah gathered the entire group, and they all sat in a circle in the forest. Noah was currently clad in a black outfit. It was open around the chest, making it

perfectly clear she was a woman. This wasn't an evening dress, though. It was sorcerer's armor, meant to enhance the power of the wearer's magic. And while it looked like it was lacking in defense, it emitted a barrier that made it stronger than a suit of full plate mail.

Before now, she had played the role of a duke or general in Lyferia, and dressed accordingly. But right now, she knew titles and status wouldn't be of much use. Looking around at her comrades' faces, Noah parted her lips.

"...It seems half of my estimates were correct, while the other half were off. I was right in that the Gelmed Empire would try to destroy Lyferia."

"And they did a splendid job of smashing this country to dust," Maximum nodded.

He was a Human male with black-rimmed glasses. His black hair parted to one side, giving him the face of an intellectual researcher. The body his head was sitting on, however, was a hulking mass of muscle. Currently he was following Noah's orders, effectively making him the sub-leader of this group.

Sitting next to him was the white-haired Dwarf, Alan. He shared his name with the ancient hero, but he wasn't related to him in any way, as many were named after this hero. While he was still young, however, his skill made him lauded as the second coming of the hero. He'd never lost a one-on-one match against the other members of the Order of Palace Knights.

"Hey, if you let me fight a Magimatic Sol head on and go all out, I wouldn't lose!" he insisted.

"Stop being stupid, you doofus." Another member of the order, a Demon girl, snapped at him mockingly. "You might be fine, but the rest of us wouldn't. You saw how that horned Demon, Diablo, defeated them, didn't you?"

She was identical to a Human except for the tattoos running along her face and body. This was the group's magi gunner, Daisy. She was a major supporter of Noah and often butted heads with Alan. And as always, Alan retorted at her.

"That's just him being weak."

"God, you're stupid. He fired a Lightning Storm spell without a magical circle! Do you have any idea how high an elemental sorcerer's level has to be to pull

that off?!”

“It’s fine, I’ll just whack them until they go poof!”

“You dumb hero!”

A Pantherian woman with a tall, finely-toned body tried to calm the two of them down. This was the group’s lancer, and her spear — which was three times her height — was thrust into the ground next to her. Pantherians traditionally preferred short, simple names, and Chobi was no exception. She didn’t have a surname, since her family wasn’t of any particular repute.

“Alan’s plenty strong without knowing anything about magic, so it’s fine,” she said.

“Stop spoiling the idiot, Chobi!” Daisy spat at her.

Realizing that the conversation would come to a standstill with these two arguing, a young Elf man motioned for Noah to continue. He had a crimson long coat and a black longsword — the warrior who introduced himself as ‘Thanatos the Undying.’

“So what part did you get wrong, Noah?” he asked.

“The Gelmed Empire is far too strong. I didn’t expect the castle to fall that quickly. And then there’s that Magimatic Castle...”

“We gotta fight them!” Alan interrupted Noah’s words only for Daisy to clasp both hands over his mouth. “Mgmgmgmg...?!”

“How dare you interrupt Lady Noah! Now shut up, or I’ll shoot you in the mouth!”

They were clamoring loudly. And while they were a long way from the enemy, they were still technically operating in secret... Exasperated, Noah kept talking.

“But if I made one major miscalculation, it was that I assumed Emperor Gelmed would have either died of old age or lost his powers by now.”

“It seems he’s quite old,” Maximum added. “Over one hundred years old.”

“Which means he’s almost at the end of his lifespan, so long as he’s not an Elf. But the Emperor is looking for the Girl of the Vessel, and that’s a major issue I

didn't predict."

"What do you mean?" Maximum asked.

Someone else answered his question — a Grasswalker girl, seated atop the carriage's roof and swinging her legs. Her white rabbit ears were hidden under a small hat and her body was covered by a robe, making her look like a Human child.

Her name was Utata. Having names that repeated the same sounds was a long-running Grasswalker tradition.

"See, the Girl of the Vessel is the secret to rejuvenation, I guess," she said.

"Rejuvenation...?" Maximum repeated the word.

"Well, technically, you could call it rebirth, I guess? People are born as pure, unblemished souls, but as they mature, their souls become blighted and polluted. Normally, when you die, your soul gets purified in Heaven, and your memories get wiped in the process. Then you're born again as a baby."

"Hearing you talk about religion is unusual, Utata," Maximum said.

"Well, the Church twists the story in a way that's convenient for them, I guess, but sorcerers acknowledge the validity of this theory. But then there's the Girl of the Vessel. She's probably capable of containing large, heavy souls within her body. Wowzers."

Maximum nodded, humming to himself. He wasn't a sorcerer, but he understood quickly enough.

"So Emperor Gelmed is trying to use the Girl of the Vessel so she can give birth to him again... Is that what you're saying?"

"So it seems," another feminine-voice hummed.

A large man got off the carriage. He was a former Paladin and a master Summoner — Gewalt, now operating as a member of the Palace Knights. He was recently gravely injured, but thanks to healing magic and a period of rest, he had returned to the fold.

"The summon I sent to scout out the battlefield picked up on the Emperor's words. 'Conceive me, give birth to me, grant me new life.' Assuming he wasn't

making something up, Utata's guess seems to be right on the money."

Noah nodded.

"Waiting for the Emperor to pass away wasn't a good idea," she said.

The others nodded. Maximum, Alan, Daisy, Chobi, Thanatos, Utata, and Gewalt. Those were the current ranks of the Order of Palace Knights, and while they had other members, this was an emergency, so Noah didn't have the time to call for them. The earth dragon-drawn dragon carriage they used was large, but it only had room for eight people, and Noah didn't want to move in large numbers if it meant slowing down the speed of their retreat.

There was strength in numbers, but letting their only chance of winning pass them by would only seal their defeat. And the greater their numbers, the slower they'd be, so rather than relying on large numbers, she picked the elite few who would be capable of adapting to the changing situation.

"I didn't know Emperor Gelmed would be that eerie, though," Utata said, scoffing.

"Though I can understand the Emperor's motives," Thanatos agreed.

That comment earned him cold gazes from the rest of the group, especially the women.

"Go away," Daisy snapped at him.

"W-Wait!" Thanatos hurriedly corrected himself. "I did not mean this talk of giving birth! I merely meant I understand the desire to become younger!"

But everyone's attitudes remained just as cold.

"Really now?" Daisy cocked an eyebrow. "Well, whatever. Let's leave it at that. Just... don't look at me, got it?"

"Now, now..." Chobi said with a bothered expression. "Though, I'll admit I don't want to give birth to Thanatos, either..."

"I never asked you to!"

"Gahahaha!" Alan pointed at Thanatos, laughing. "You're such a freak!"

"You don't even understand half of what we're talking about!" Thanatos

shouted at him. “Go on, explain the situation again!”

“Erm... We gotta beat the Emperor, right?!”

“If we could do that, we wouldn’t be in this bind, now would we?!” Thanatos howled, but then...

Alan’s expression changed. His face strained with bloodlust, and he dropped his stance low, his hand flying to his sword. For a second Thanatos thought everyone present was going to kill him, but then Alan shouted in the direction of the woods.

“Who’s there?!”

†

A figure strolled out of the woods, approaching them composedly with a gait so calm the Palace Knights wondered if they were villagers living nearby. But it was a child — a child with horns, brightly-colored hair, and a tail.

“It is I, this Demon Lord,” Klem introduced herself.

Behind her was Edelgard, who was leading her earth dragon by its harness.

The Fallen?! Noah rose to her feet.

“I never would have expected to run into Fallen here...!” Maximum said, stepping forward.

“Back off, Maximum, they’re mine! I’ve been sitting on my hands for too long!” Alan called out.



Klem raised her hands.

“Do not emit so much bloodlust, fool. The Emperor will notice us.”

“Be quiet, Fallen!”

“Hmph... A dunce, I see. Did you not hear me? I am the Demon Lord Krebskulm!”

But that only made Noah’s group feel all the more menaced.

“Krebskulm, the strongest Demon Lord...?! It can’t be!” Noah shouted in shock.

“No way... But a Fallen would never assume a Demon Lord’s name,” Utata said. “So you’re either one of the races pretending to be a Demon Lord... Or you’re the real thing!”

“This Demon Lord is the real thing. I could demonstrate my power, but... Hm. If I do, we’ll certainly draw his attention.”

“That won’t be necessary,” Maximum shook his head.

“Really?” Noah asked.

“Just by facing her, I can sense her power. If nothing else, she’s much stronger than a Fallen in disguise.”

“Mmhmm. Finally someone who understands,” Klem nodded sagely.

“But to think the Demon Lord would be revived, and now of all times...”

“This Demon Lord was not revived recently,” Klem shrugged. “But it matters not. Listen to what I have to say.”

“A Demon Lord’s... trying to negotiate...?”

For the races, a Demon Lord was destruction and massacre incarnate. Their role in nature was to kill the races, and they existed for nothing else. For all Noah and her group knew, the very conversation they were having right now was an unprecedented event, never before seen in the history of this world.

“What’s the big idea?” Alan asked, held back by Maximum’s raised hand. “She’s super strong, but... I don’t feel any bloodlust from her. Are you really a

Demon Lord?”

Maximum had to be cautious while keeping his own allies in check. It was challenging.

“Contain yourself, Alan. You call her ‘super strong,’ but her power is beyond measure. I cannot perceive the limits of what she’s capable of.”

“But, c’mooooon...” Alan whined.

“I understand what you’re trying to say. But I think there can be no doubting that we’re the first people in history to have been invited to a dialogue with the Fallen.”

“Mm?” Edelgard cocked her head at his comment.

She had conversations with the people of Faltra, after all...

†

From Klem’s perspective, the Palace Knights were a gathering of people with considerable skill. They were promising, which meant that she needed to speak to them, at all costs, even if it did mean braving some degree of danger.

Klem took a few steps forward and sat down not far from Noah and the others. Edelgard stood behind her. She put her spear down on the ground, as if to show she meant them no harm.

“What, aren’t you going to sit?” Klem asked them.

The first to move was Noah.

“...This is fascinating. A Demon Lord inviting the races to conversation... I never imagined I’d live to see the day.”

Truthfully, Noah felt pressured. She was in a deadlock, and needed a way to break through this situation.

“Mm...” Maximum stood next to Noah with a grim, sour expression.

He was still visibly cautious. The rest of the group looked primed to attack Klem. She didn’t seem to mind, though; she was used to having the races direct animosity toward her.

“There’s something I’d like to ask you first, if you don’t mind,” Noah said.

“How did you know we were hiding here?”

“You may have hidden your presence, but your earth dragon is still a magical beast,” Klem replied. “I can sense it as if it were a part of this Demon Lord’s body. If you seek to hide yourselves from a Demon Lord, you would be better off not bringing it along.”

“...Unbelievable. To think I’d overlook that... Thank you for your advice.”

The Palace Knights exchanged gazes, as if asking if that really made sense. Utata alone had her eyes wide with surprise.

“This is... this is incredible!” she exclaimed. “It’s a huge discovery! One could be granted the Magia Rainbow award for discovering this!”

“Be quiet!” Chobi grabbed her and covered her mouth, just like Daisy did with Alan.

“Mgmgmgmg...!” Muffled moans escaped Utata’s lips as she thrashed in Chobi’s grasp. The height difference made them look like an adult grappling a child.

“It’s our time to answer your questions then,” Noah said, moving the conversation along. “Though, honestly speaking, it depends on the question.”

“I’ve heard your conversation,” Klem gazed at Noah. “You seek to defeat Emperor Gelmed, yes?”

“Of course. I love the people of Lyferia and want to create a peaceful country.”

“Mmhmm. Good,” Klem nodded in satisfaction.

“Then allow me to ask the next question. Why does the Demon Lord want to stop the Emperor? Demon Lords are those who slay the races... I don’t see why you’d be interested in a war we fight amongst ourselves.”

Edelgard nodded a few times at Noah’s words. From the Fallen’s perspective, this war held no meaning.

“Mm...” Klem scratched her cheek, as if conflicted. “Well, this Demon Lord doesn’t so much care about the war itself... But the Emperor won’t make towns that produce tasty biscuits.”

“...Biscuits?”

“And most importantly, I promised Diablo I would defend that city.”

“Diablo?!” All the color drained from Noah’s face. “You mean... that horned Demon?!”

“Mm,” Klem nodded. “He is this Demon Lord’s master.”

Klem grabbed the iron collar around her neck, as if to present it. Her words struck the Palace Knights into silence.

“I-Is that an 《Enslavement Collar》?!” Noah half-rose to her feet. “He *enslaved a Demon Lord*?! Are you saying he actually was a real Demon Lord?!”

“No,” Klem shook her head. “When did I say that? He is of the races. At least in body. I know not of what lies within him.”

Those words made Noah fall into contemplative silence.

“...It can’t be...But that means... he really might... might be the same... But the way he talks... Why?”

“Mm?” Klem furrowed her brows. “Come to think of it, you too have an odd scent about you.”

“A scent...?” Noah raised her arm, sniffing her sleeve. “I’ll admit I’m a bit sweaty, but that’s because I haven’t had a chance to bathe over the last few days... Though I’ve been using magic to purify myself.”

“Not that kind of scent!” Klem exclaimed.

“That’s what I assumed.”

Klem then rose to her feet.

“I want you to serve this Demon Lord!” she said. “We must go and pummel Emperor Gelmed!”

“I refuse,” Noah said composedly.

“What?!”

“King Lyferia is dead, which means this is a war to avenge him... And whoever leads this war will be made the next ruler of this country. If a Demon Lord were

to become king, the people of this land will be beyond saving.”

“Nng...” Klem furrowed her brows. “I don’t understand what you’re saying. We defeat the enemy — is that not enough?”

“No, it isn’t. Selecting the next king is crucial. If you want us to cooperate, *you* will have to serve under *me*.”

As she spoke, Noah felt her heartbeat quicken. As brazen as she may have acted, she was nervous. A cold sweat ran down her back. An air of tension hung around them, and she could hear Maximum swallow nervously.

“Lady Noah... That may have been a bit too...”

“Demon Lord... serve under you?!” Edelgard growled angrily. “Races tell... Demon Lord to serve...?!”

Seeing her aggression, Alan and Thanatos drew their weapons.

“Guess we gotta fight them after all!” Alan said defiantly, holding up his weapon.

“When all is said and done, they are but the Fallen... Beasts in the shape of man. Such is the will of Gaia,” Thanatos remarked, glaring at Edelgard and Klem with his longsword drawn.

Klem, however, kept her gaze fixed on Noah.

“You... Do you like biscuits?” she asked, eyeing Noah fixedly.

“...Biscuits...? You mean that common confection?” Noah furrowed her brow suspiciously. “It’s a bit of a sudden question, but... I don’t mind biscuits, though I prefer apple tarts.”

“Mm?! A-pple t-arts?! What is that?!” Klem asked, her eyes wide.

“A sweet from my hometown. I would have the castle’s cooks bake an exquisite one, had it not been for this state of affairs... I can only pray they’re all alive and well...”

“Very well!” Klem decided. “This Demon Lord shall serve under you!”

“...Huh?” Noah doubted what she’d just heard.

“That way, we can defeat the Emperor! And you can have your cooks make an

apple tart for me!”

It took Noah a few seconds of stupefied silence to process what had just happened.

“...You, a Demon Lord, are saying you’ll serve under me?”

“What’s the matter? It was your idea. I should hope you’re not going to run with your tail between your legs now.”

“O-Of course not!”

The Gelmed Empire was in pursuit of the Girl of the Vessel. Noah doubted Diablo would hand her over, but... if they succeeded in their ploy, there was the risk of that anomalous Magimatic mage rejuvenating. There was no telling how powerful he would be if he were to regain his full strength and vitality. If nothing else, he certainly wouldn’t be weaker than he was now. And he would have another century to live, with all that power intact.

They had to fight.

According to Gewalt’s reconnaissance, the Empire had lost its commander and the invasion army had all but collapsed. Most of the enemy’s Magimatic Sols were lost in battle, as well. If they had any chance of pulling this off, it was now.

“If we let this opportunity pass us by, we’ll likely never have a chance at winning again.”

“Then let’s go, now!” Klem got to her feet and started walking.

“W-Wait! I’ll be the one to make that decision!” Noah reflexively placed a hand on her shoulder.

She’d reached out and touched her, fooled by her child-like conduct. But upon realizing who she had just reached out to, she stopped, a shiver running down her spine. She just touched a Demon Lord.

“Yes, right...” Klem said, scratching her head as if bothered. “This Demon Lord is your subordinate now. Very well, give your orders.”

Klem, however, accepted her words. Relief washed over Noah.

“...Keep our agreement in mind.”

“Mm, I will! Go on, give the order! We must find Diablo first! Without him, we cannot beat the Emperor!”

Rejected.

The word instinctively rose in Noah’s throat, but she forced herself to swallow it. Diablo had transcendent strength, that much was clear. He would be a great asset to have on their side... Assuming he cooperated.

“I have my qualms about Diablo... He doesn’t strike me as someone who can be reasoned with. I can never tell what he’s thinking.”

“Mm!” Klem nodded in agreement, holding up her index finger. “He’s an odd one!”

“He is!” Noah affirmed vigorously.

“Despite being neither a king nor a hero, he fought the Demon Lord to protect the races. What else can you call that one if not odd?”

Noah considered Klem’s words. Her spies have kept her apprised of Diablo’s actions. Between that and the unreliable rumors she had heard, it would seem that Diablo was working to save the races. If the rumors were to be believed... It wouldn’t be wrong to praise Diablo as a hero.

But she couldn’t bring herself to trust Diablo. After all, how could she believe in someone that wouldn’t admit to their own heroics?

“But why does he make such a show of his powers yet hide his achievements? I can’t understand him.”

“Who knows?” Klem shrugged. “Perhaps you should ask him that question.”

“Mm...” Noah was still undecided.

“Now then, the first problem is Diablo’s whereabouts. I can sense his presence on this land, but the city is too big. Couldn’t you have made it smaller...?”

Noah calculated the situation.

We have a Demon Lord on our side. I think we’re perfectly capable of beating

the Gelmed Empire. Do we really need Diablo on our side? It doesn't matter how strong he is. A game piece that defies orders has no value. If anything, he's a liability...

But refusing might make Krebskulm break off from us and go looking for Diablo herself, and we need her power. She's our key to beating this situation, I can't afford to lose her.

"Diablo's at the Grand Cathedral, yes?" Noah asked, turning a glance at Gewalt, who stood at her back.

"Yes, for certain," he nodded. "It looks like he can freely go in and out of the Inner Sanctum. It does make sense, given how little Lumachina adores him."

"Ooh, you know where Diablo and Lumachina are?!" Klem reacted to Gewalt.

"Heheh... Of course I do. My adorable Summon Beast, 《Secret Graho》, is keeping a close eye on them."

"You're a smart one! This Demon Lord praises you!"

"Why, thank you!"

...I suppose meeting him wouldn't hurt, Noah concluded. But either way, staying here and looking through the binoculars isn't going to make things swing our way.

"We'll go around and into the northern forest come nightfall," she instructed Maximum. "We'll leave our dragon carriage there and head to the northern gate by foot, using 《Stealth》 as we do."

"Can we really trust a Demon Lord?" he asked her anxiously.

"We'll just have to see. For now, believe in me."

Maximum bowed respectfully and boarded the carriage.

†

In the Inner Sanctum, Diablo sat in his room. Rose came to him, asking for a fast recharge, but Diablo declined. The thought of doing it in a place that was essentially holy ground didn't sit well with him.

A fast recharge would turn this place into a horny ground instead...

Rose stood against the wall. Just being in Diablo's vicinity was enough for her to gradually recharge.

"Master, Rose will temporarily enter sleep mode. If you are in need of assistance, do call out to Rose."

"Mm... I'll try to sleep, too."

"Pleasant dreams, Master."

"Mm."

Diablo got into bed, with Rem and Shera sleeping to his left and right. It was cramped compared to the ones in the Peace of Mind Inn, which meant he had far more contact with the girls' bodies. At this point, this shouldn't have gotten him excited...

It shouldn't have. He was used to it. That's what he told himself, but the sensation of their bodies against his hands made his pulse jump. And while he was very much fatigued, the contact blew away any sense of drowsiness.

"...Can't sleep?" Rem, who had shared a bed with him for the first time in a while, asked.

"Aren't you sleepy, Diablo?" Shera chimed in from the other side.

"Mm. I'm considering our next step," Diablo replied.

This was a lie, but he really was concerned about that.

The Inner Sanctum forbade men and women from sharing a bed. Even for married couples, sleeping together was seen as too indecent for a place of worship and was strictly forbidden. But Rem was under pursuit from Emperor Gelmed, and Shera was the sole and essential heir to the Kingdom of Greenwood.

So this wasn't them sharing a bed. Diablo was watching over the two of them. This was Rem and Shera's room, and Diablo was there under the pretext of guarding them.

...Though he was very much lying in the same bed as them.

Rem nestled against Diablo's body, clinging to him.

“...You had to put yourself in danger because of me again,” she whispered into his ear.

Her breath was ticklish, but the expression on her face was terribly strained.

“Hmph! Did you ever wish to be the Girl of the Vessel? Is being sought after by him something you wanted?”

“Never.”

“Then what reason do you have to fret?!”

“...You really are a sweet person, Diablo,” Rem said, a fragile smile on her lips.

“Nng?!” Diablo recoiled, raising his voice on her. “F-Fool! I am a Demon Lord! I could never be ‘sweet’!”

But the smile on Rem’s lips didn’t fade in the slightest. Shera, meanwhile, leaned forward, as if hanging over Diablo.

“That’s not your fault. Rem!” she said.

“Mmg...” Feeling her bosom, which was uncharacteristically large for an Elf, press against his chest made Diablo’s breath clog in his throat from sheer nerves.

“...We understand, so please drag your pointless flab blobs off of Diablo,” Rem said, glaring at Shera.

“Uuu...” Shera frowned. “It’s not my fault, my body’s just like this.”

“...Kuh.” Rem rolled her eyes.

“But Rem, I care about you! So no matter what comes your way, I’ll fight!” Shera beamed at her.

“...You’re better off keeping yourself safe. I’ll be fine. I have Diablo.”

“Whaaa?!” Shera asked, tears building up in her eyes.

“...B-But... Well, I’m glad you care about me that much. Thank you.”

As always, Rem couldn’t be upfront about her feelings. Shera’s cheeks flushed, and she lunged at Rem, hugging her.

“Reeeem!”

“Aaah?!” Rem called out, taken aback. “S-Stop... What are you thinking?!”

“Reeem, I love love love you!”

Shera had clung onto Rem in an embrace atop Diablo’s body, and the two of them grappled like that for a short moment.

Aaaah... Diablo felt his head spin as the two girls tussled atop him.

“Get *off* of me!” Rem pushed Shera away, shaking off her grasp.

Shera squeaked as she fell back.

“...Now listen to me, you.”

“Y-Yeah?”

The two of them finally settled down, each of them sitting at one of Diablo’s sides.

“...Shera, Emperor Gelmed is a greater threat than anything we’ve faced before. He might even be stronger than the Demon Overlord.”

“He’s that strong?”

“...Diablo’s magic at least worked on the Demon Overlord.”

Rem realized it, huh...

“It didn’t work? But he defeated that snake thing?”

“...That thing was similar to a Summon Beast. But that castle is simply too large, and it even has a barrier that repels magic.”

“Ah, like the one in Faltra?”

“Yes... And you saw how powerful its attack was, right?”

“Hmm... Well, I didn’t really see it, because everything went white, and then there was a big boom.”

“...Yes, you’re right.”

The enemy’s attack was so large in scale that Shera couldn’t properly perceive the sheer magnitude of it. Diablo saw the devastation himself, since he flew up with magic to check, and Rem’s level as a sorcerer was high, so she could estimate how powerful the attack must have been.

Shera couldn't imagine a spell simply wiping out an entire town, and Diablo couldn't blame her. It was absurd. He wasn't sure if that attack even counted as sorcery as he knew it.

"And that scary guy is going after you, Rem...?" Shera asked anxiously.

"...Yes, that's what it means."

"Aren't you scared?"

"...Of course I am," Rem said, a shiver in her voice. "But I'm still going to fight. I know I'm nowhere near strong enough, but I can't sit idly by and wait for defeat to sweep over me."

She really was scared, but she made the choice to fight all the same. She declared she would struggle to her last breath.

...You're a strong girl.

Diablo was astonished at Rem's resolve, but it also made him realize just how faint his resolve really was. Rem's determination didn't break even in the face of despair and hopelessness. She became an adventurer, swearing she would find a way to destroy the Demon Lord's soul sealed within her body. A girl like her wouldn't back down, no matter how great her opponent may be.

By comparison, Diablo had the power to fight. So he couldn't lose to Rem in terms of pluck and mettle.

"I'll fight, too," Shera said, reaching out to Rem and clasping her hands.

"...Shera, you're the Elven queen. You have the weight of an entire kingdom on your shoulders. You need to be aware of that."

"I know that! But if we lose here, the Emperor could just invade Greenwood next!"

"Ugh... Y-You're right, but..." Rem stuttered.

"I'm scared too, but I think running away by myself will be meaningless," Shera said anxiously. "So I'll fight with you."

"...That's surprisingly well-thought out, coming from you."

"Heheheh... Right?!"

“...That wasn’t a compliment.”

“It wasn’t?”

The will to fight...

Diablo, too, hardened his resolve. He wouldn’t hand Rem over to anyone, and he would protect Shera at all costs. He would defeat Emperor Gelmed, no matter what.

All the fear and anxiety left his heart. His thoughts felt keen, and he felt primed to fight.

How do I even fight him...? How can I defeat him?

He needed some kind of lynchpin that would allow him to break through this situation.

†

In the middle of the night, Diablo woke up to the sound of knocking on the door, and he could tell something was wrong even before the messenger said anything. Diablo was called outside, with Rem and Shera following after him. Diablo decided to leave Rose, who was still damaged, in sleep mode.

They were led to the 《Prayer Room of Light》, which was similar in design to the castle’s audience chamber. The main differences were that the room was much more plain and frugal in appearance and that the prayer room had more pillars. Diablo speculated the castle’s audience chamber was designed based on this room.

Sitting at the very back of the room was Lumachina, occupying the High Priest’s seat.

“My apologies for calling for you at this time of night, Lord Diablo,” Lumachina apologized with a frown.

“Do understand that this is a state of emergency,” Tria, who stood to the right of Lumachina, appended.

Sylvie stood at Lumachina’s left, her expression strained with tension.

That’s unusual for Sylvie... Diablo thought to himself.

But the reason soon became clear when they saw the visitors standing in the room. Diablo recognized them. When he first visited the capital, he'd seen them once, and had even spoken to some of them.

The Palace Knights?!

When he heard the king had died and Lyferia's army was routed, he was sure the Palace Knights fell in battle, too. It seemed they weren't part of that fight, though. Standing at the front of the group was a woman clad in a black dress who glared aggressively at Diablo.

"A horned Demon..."

The air about her was so different that Diablo couldn't immediately recognize her.

"You're the minister, Noah...?" Rem seemed to have noticed before he did.

"Yes, that's right," the girl in the black dress said, still frowning. "It's been some time, Queens Rem and Shera Greenwood."

Diablo's eyes widened in surprise. He finally recalled who she was. The handsome, androgynous minister who was at King Lyferia's side during the audience.

He was a woman the whole time?!

Lyferia was a country rife with discrimination; the Demi-humans were seen as inferior to Humans, and women were seen as lesser than men. To that end, Diablo was surprised to find that one of the most influential people in the kingdom was a woman.

No... That's probably why she masqueraded as a man. And, well, I guess she doesn't have to bother with that anymore, given the situation. No matter which way this war ends, the Kingdom of Lyferia is done for.

"Hii?!" Shera suddenly screeched.

Her eyes were fixed on Noah's subordinates, one of them in particular.

Gewalt.

"Hello there, sweetie~♥" He winked at her.

Rem braced herself, pulling a summon crystal from her pocket. Diablo also held his staff at the ready. King Lyferia was dead, but they had nonetheless rebelled against him and fought against his army when he was still alive... And during that battle, they faced Gewalt. Diablo wasn't naive enough to trust that Gewalt would hesitate to continue that battle now.



But Diablo's tension was broken when another, unexpected figure hurried over to him.

"Rem! Shera! You two are still alive!" Klem beamed as she approached them.

"Klem?!" Both girls exclaimed.

"I've been looking for you, Diablo!" Klem turned to face him haughtily. "This Demon Lord going out of her way to look for someone is unheard of!"

"You... What are you doing here?!" Diablo asked, taken aback.

He didn't think he'd meet Klem here, whom they left behind in Faltra. He could see Edelgard a short distance behind, too.

"Klem, is everyone in Faltra all right?!" Rem asked her in a panic. "Did something happen?!"

"Mm? The city is fine," Klem said composedly. "I would not have come here if something had happened there, would I?"

"Ah... Yes, you're right..." Rem breathed a sigh of relief.

"But if we don't defeat Emperor Gelmed, it'll only be a matter of time until Faltra is reduced to ruins as well!"

Rem clenched her teeth. There was no denying that. As ominous as Klem's words were, they were fact.

"Come with this Demon Lord!" Klem took hold of Diablo's arm and yanked, as if urging him to follow. "We cannot leave that thing to its own devices!"

"You mean Emperor Gelmed? True, we cannot neglect to do something about him."

Diablo spoke while sticking to his Demon Lord role play, but he was anxious on the inside.

Shouldn't we keep it a secret from Noah that Klem is a Demon Lord...?

Diablo turned to look at Noah, who took a step forward to face him.

"We don't have a moment to spare anymore, so I say we bargain," she said, eyeing him defiantly.

“Oh?”

“I already know that this girl is Krebskulm, the strongest Demon Lord.”

“Huh?!” Lumachina gasped.

The paladins at her side reached for their blades.

Right, Lumachina didn't know...

The only ones in the room who knew about this until now were Diablo, Rem, Shera, Rose, Sylvie, and apparently Noah and the Palace Knights.

“Mm!” Klem nodded. “This Demon Lord is Krebskulm!”

“...Are you sure you should be saying that?” Rem asked nervously.

Klem didn't seem the slightest bit disturbed.

“I don't like annoying situations like this one, but I wouldn't be able to fight Emperor Gelmed while hiding who I am,” she shrugged.

“...I'm surprised,” Rem said. “I didn't think you'd interfere in a war among the races.”

“Noah told me that Emperor Gelmed wouldn't create a country that makes tasty biscuits! And I want to try an apple tart, too!”

“...An apple tart?”

“Oh yeah, that cake was so tasty!” Shera exclaimed, clapping her hands together.

“Nn?! You've had an apple tart before, Shera?!” Klem asked with round eyes.

“Yeah! Noah gave me some before!”

“I want to eat it too! This Demon Lord demands an apple tart!”

Diablo did note to himself that he hadn't seen anything like an apple tart in Faltra. It must have been a rare sort of cake in Lyferia.

“The Demon Lord Krebskulm says her objectives are in alignment with ours, so we decided to cooperate with her,” Noah said, bringing the conversation back on track.

She very much had the facial expression and mannerisms of some kind of

master manipulator. Diablo thought to himself bitterly that had the Gelmed Empire not invaded when it did, Diablo and his group would have had to go up against this woman.

I can't say for sure we're on the same side, even now...

"Your objectives are in alignment?" Shera cocked her head. "So that means... Noah, you're fighting for apple tarts, too?!"

"...What in the world are you saying, Shera?" Rem asked, glaring at her.

Klem was the only one who would fight for something like biscuits or apple tarts.

"That's not what I..." Noah started, but then changed her mind. "No, maybe that's not too far from the truth. I do want to drive out these invaders and create a country where people are free to eat tasty apple tarts. In that regard, I can't deny what you said."

"Yay!" Shera grinned at her.

Rem didn't seem convinced, though.

"...I suppose that's as good a reason as any to protect Lyferia's people," she eventually admitted.

"I see you're a woman with a strong sense of justice."

"...I am an adventurer. Protecting the races is my calling, and I can't forgive what Emperor Gelmed is doing. And, of course, there's the matter of the Emperor being after me..."

"It doesn't look like Emperor Gelmed has much time left," Noah crossed her arms. "From the looks of things, he wants the Girl of the Vessel in order to rejuvenate himself before he dies of old age."

"...Given what he said, that seems likely."

"This is just hypothetical, of course, but have you considered that if you were to kill yourself, it wouldn't be long until Emperor Gelmed dies naturally?"

What?!

Diablo stepped in between them.

“Spare her your nonsense!” he bellowed. “How can you say for certain that her dying isn’t the key for the ritual magic to trigger, or that there aren’t other Girls of the Vessel besides her?!”

“My apologies if I offended you,” Noah said, taking a step back. “But I think you misunderstood me. I was asking if the anxiety of this situation was making her contemplate suicide.”

This time, Rem stepped in between Diablo and Noah, who were again glaring at each other.

“...The thought did occur to me, but my answer remains the same. I am a summoner. And besides, I’ve already gone through something similar before.”

“Something similar...? I don’t think this is the kind of situation one runs into often...” Noah muttered.

Noah seemed to know a great deal, but apparently she wasn’t aware that Klem was originally sealed within Rem’s body.

“...Let’s just say I have a great deal of experience when it comes to my body’s nature as a ‘vessel,’” Rem let out with a thin smile.

“I see. If you say you’re used to trouble surrounding this matter, I’ll believe you. Gewalt’s reports already drew a picture of you as a stouthearted girl.”

“Aah... yes...” Rem said, regarding Gewalt with an unpleasant glance.

Gewalt simply winked back at her — a wink so flamboyant Diablo half-expected it to produce some kind of comical sound effect. Rem defeated him in combat by using the 《Demon Lord’s Fang》, but he was still, by far, the stronger summoner. Given these circumstances, Rem seemed to not get along with him at all.

†

“Now that we’ve each revealed what we know, I think it’s time we plan our strategy going forward,” Noah suggested. “We’re effectively all backed against the wall here. If we don’t eliminate the threat pressing down on us, we can’t even consider thinking of the future.”

“Hmph...” Diablo scoffed. “We need only defeat Emperor Gelmed. What more

is there to consider?”

“Encouraging words. However, even you can’t hope to do this on your own.”

You can’t do this on your own. Diablo wouldn’t have been a famous solo player if he was the kind of person to simply nod and go along with such a statement.

“Heheheh... Would you like to have a taste of my power and see for yourself?” he asked Noah menacingly.

“No, I believe I’ll abstain. Fighting and exhausting ourselves here would only benefit the enemy. And I’ll admit, I’m skeptical as to whether I’d even be able to convince you to begin with.”

“As you should be,” Diablo said coldly.

“No!” Klem raised her voice. “Without Diablo on our side, we can’t beat him!”

“You can leave this matter to me,” Diablo nodded assuringly.

“Heheh... You’re confident, aren’t you?” Noah said, cracking a wry smile. “But you don’t have any way of getting close to the Magimatic Castle, do you?”

“You make it sound like you do.”

“Of course I do. I am blessed with capable comrades, after all.”

Diablo turned his eyes to the Palace Knights. She probably had some kind of specialist in the field of movement magic. Diablo, by contrast, was an Annihilation Sorcerer, optimized for maximum firepower. He could use basic flight magic, but he wasn’t any good when it came to placing buffs on his party.

We need to cross the barrier and get inside the castle... Can high level teleportation do that?

Faltra had a barrier for repelling the Fallen, but it had never prevented him from teleporting in or out of the city before. Perhaps the same logic applied here.

“Right now, I’m the group’s leader,” Noah said, placing a hand over her chest for emphasis. “I know that if we make the most of our talents and cover for each other’s weaknesses, we’ll be able to defeat the Gelmed Empire. I don’t

imagine you'll reject this offer?"

"I don't like it," Diablo whispered.

Several of the Palace Knights displayed clear enmity and bloodlust toward him for that comment. The magi gunner girl and the Elf swordsman — Thanatos the Undying, if he recalled — both glared at him. But Diablo wouldn't have stuck to his Demon Lord role play for as long as he had if he was the type of person to let the normies' scornful gazes get to him. No, Demon Lords always responded to any situation with an indomitable smirk.

"Why should you be the leader?" he asked defiantly.

It was hard to tell without actually fighting her, but Diablo and Klem were probably stronger than Noah one-on-one. In fact, the captain of the Palace Knights, and even Alan for that matter, looked stronger than her too.

"Why should I be the leader, you ask?" Noah replied with composed boldness. "That would be because I have the strongest leadership skills out of everyone here. You, on the other hand, are probably the weakest when it comes to that."

Diablo couldn't argue with that. He'd tried to lead a charge into the castle, but it only resulted in his comrades splitting up. If it wasn't for Horn's quick-witted actions, there was no telling how that attack would have ended.

And the same was true when they charged the Grand Cathedral before. He couldn't give his allies the appropriate orders... If he had given them any orders at all.

"...This is foolish." That was the only reply Diablo was able to eventually make.

"Is it?" Noah asked him.

This reminded Diablo of his old world. He was known for being the strongest player, so parties that believed in gathering strong people tried to convince him to join. But with Diablo's personality being what it is, he never accepted.

"If I have a reason to fight, I will fight. I will think things through on my own and make my own decisions! What point is there to living if you must follow

someone else's orders?"

"Everyone that's under my command is only here because they made that choice on their own. I didn't force them into obeying me. I didn't do anything to coerce you either, did I?"

Well, you're definitely trying to corner me into saying yes. I hate normies like you, trying to force their will onto other people.

"...I am a Demon Lord from another world, Diablo! You are a fool if you think I will obey anyone's words, no matter who they may be!"

"Then it's a pity, but if you won't acknowledge me as your leader, there's nothing I can do," Noah shook her head. "It doesn't matter how strong you are, you're useless to us if you won't cooperate. All you'll do is sabotage our efforts."

Her words were reasonable, but the things she said pried Diablo's old wounds open.

You can't do this on your own. You don't have what it takes to lead. You're useless if you can't cooperate.

Taking orders from the races went against what a Demon Lord stood for, but that wasn't the only reason Diablo tried to distance himself from Noah. Being around her made things he didn't want to think about surface in his mind.

No one else seemed to feel that way, though.

"Lord Diablo, remember that the Palace Knights are the strongest force Lyferia has," Lumachina said. "Can't you find it in yourself to cooperate with them?"

Lumachina was good-willed to the core, so it only made sense she'd make this kind of suggestion. Sylvie seemed to be in agreement, too, and even Rem was pressing him to change his mind.

"...Diablo, please reconsider. Noah's suggestion is valid, in my opinion. We're up against a menacing enemy, and we'll need as many strong people on our side as we can get."

"Yep, yep! Let's all fight together!" Shera nodded, as cooperative as ever.

Before he knew it, everyone other than him was in favor of joining forces with the Palace Knights. He was the only one left out.

...What the hell?

Just moments ago, Diablo was... maybe not at the center of attention, but at least everyone was on his side. He felt a sense of unity with them. But now, Diablo was the only one still insisting on having his way.

Alienation... Loneliness...

Diablo turned his back on them. In the end, it was always like this. They only needed him because he happened to have a high level... And now, when they had a whole group of high level people to rely on, he was seen as uncooperative. Unnecessary.

I knew it'd be like this... I really can't live with other people.

But just as he was about to leave the room, someone reached out to him, pulled him back, and embraced him.

"Wait, Diablo!" Shera's voice reached his ears.

"...Don't go off on your own," Rem begged him.

"We need you, Diablo!" Klem scolded him.

"H-Hey... Cut it out, you three." Diablo stuttered, trying to shake them off.

"We're going together!" Klem shouted, grabbing tight onto his cloak.

It was like a little girl begging her father to take her to the amusement park on a weekend...

"Heheh..." Sylvie walked up right behind him. "Look at how much they love you, Diablo♪"

"...Kuh..." He grit his teeth bitterly. "I... cooperate with no one...! Why not ask the Palace Knights for help?"

"Because we cannot win that way!" Klem shouted at him. "Believe what this Demon Lord says, Diablo!"

"Mm? Do you know something about Emperor Gelmed?" Diablo asked, narrowing his eyes.

“Well, I am a Demon Lord, after all!”

That was a hard answer for Diablo to accept. Following her advice after she said that would be admitting he wasn't a Demon Lord. And then he would lose all his relationships, be seen as an obstinate fool, and everything he did would be reduced to meaninglessness... He had to stick to his role play. Otherwise, he'd have to reveal his true self.

“Fine,” Diablo sighed. “Get away.”

The girls let go of his clothes. But then, he swung through the air with his staff.

“《Ice Wall》!”

“Huh?!”

He formed a massive wall of magical ice before them. It wasn't a high level spell, so if they really wanted, they'd have been able to bust through it without much effort.

“Diablo, why?!” Rem raised her voice in shock from the other side of the layer of ice, her face distorted by the mirror-like surface.

If I could cooperate with people just because it was more efficient that way, I wouldn't have been alone all this time!

“If you think you need the Palace Knights, ask them for help. But I don't go begging to anyone!”

Turning his back to them, he left the room.

†

Diablo stood on the Inner Sanctum's balcony. Since the Inner Sanctum was levitating over the capital, there was a great distance between the balcony and the surface. If he didn't have flight magic, Diablo's knees might well have buckled in fear.

Diablo glared silently into the distance, where the Magimatic Castle Viovix loomed menacingly. Under the cover of nighttime, only its contours were visible, but even now it floated in the sky overhead. As Diablo looked out, the light of dawn was beginning to wash over the dark canopy of the stars. A red

glow drew jagged lines from behind the ridges of the mountains in the east.

Daybreak was fast approaching.

“Are you thinking of going alone?” Noah’s voice asked him.

Being approached from behind made Diablo outright jolt, but he couldn’t display any fear in front of others. Silencing his emotions, Diablo kept his eyes fixed on the Magimatic Castle.

“You do not order me around,” he spoke composedly, as if to imply he’d known she was there the whole time.

But what Noah said next truly and honestly shocked him. Enough so to make him spin around with eyes wide in shock.

“Do you know about an MMORPG called *Cross Reverie*?”

“What... did you just...?!” Diablo couldn’t hide his surprise.

Noah had spoken the game’s name. A name no one in this world had ever spoken before.

Is she... Is she the same as me...?!

“Heheheh...” Noah brushed back her short lock and chuckled. “I knew it. So you do know about it. You really were from *that side*. Yeah, that’s the only way everything fits.”

Her tone had changed. While before she talked in a polite, almost theatrical tone, Diablo could clearly make out her emotions now. It was actually a bit unsettling...

“So you’re from there, too...?” Diablo asked.

“Yes, I’m a... visitor in this world. Yeah, that works. Same as you, anyway. Was ‘Diablo’ your screen name in the game? That’s not your real name, right?”

Takuma Sakamoto. Diablo still remembered his name, but wasn’t inclined to speak it.

“...Old names have no meaning in this world.”

“Good answer,” Noah said, a bitter smile on her lips. “I feel the same way. I don’t miss or care for that cesspool of a world.”

“I... wouldn’t go that far...” Diablo uttered, taken back a bit by the venom in her words.

“Oh? What, did you live the good life back there?” Noah asked him coldly.

“...Ah... Ugh...” Thinking of that old life made Diablo’s throat clench up.

Reverting to his natural self took away his ability to parse words properly. He was a NEET, a shut-in, a crippled gamer. Calling that “the good life” felt wrong.

“I was an office lady,” Noah said, a sardonic smirk on her lips. “I’d go to work on the earliest train and go home on the last one. The pay was crap, there were no days off, and my superiors at work would harass me for fun. Even sexually, sometimes. Couldn’t get through the day without gulping down the meds my psychiatrist gave me.”

“That sounds like hell...” Diablo muttered.

“What year are you from?” Noah suddenly asked.

“Year? What do you mean?”

“Oh? It’s your first time meeting another visitor? Must be because you shut yourself away in a backwater city like Faltra the whole time. If you were in the capital, you might have met other visitors.”

For real?!

“Hmph... Cease your pointless blabbering and answer my question,” Diablo asked, reverting to his Demon Lord role play.

Noah simply snickered at him.

“How long are you gonna keep talking like that?”

Well, I can’t help it! I can’t speak to women without acting like a Demon Lord, be it this world or that one! If you want to talk to the real me, turn into a dog or a cat or something!

“Heheh... You would insult a Demon Lord?!” Diablo stuck to his guns.

“Well, yikes... Whatever, I guess everyone has problems to sort through. All right, let’s start *really* exchanging information. I’m from *Cross Reverie*’s closing days. The time when the developer announced the game’s servers were about

to be shut down.”

“Shut down?!”

“Are you that surprised? An MMORPG where the gacha only drops weapons wasn’t going to last much longer. They did announce a sequel, though. The characters wouldn’t transfer and the system was going to be overhauled, but the setting was supposed to be the same.”

“A sequel...?!”

“Well, the game I was maining at the time had a school setting where you could roll cute school boys in the gacha. I only played *Cross Reverie* on the side, to burn time.”

A gacha game with cute school boys...?

Diablo couldn’t fathom what would be interesting about a game like that, but Noah was a woman back in the old world, too. Diablo never looked into it too deeply, but apparently games aimed at women often had male characters as drops in their gacha rolls.

“Playing social games on the train to work was all I lived for...” Noah moaned, cradling her head. “I played so many games... So why?!”

“Mm?”

“Why did I get incarnated into this bloody fantasy world instead of 《Stud Academy Men’s Love》?!”

“Don’t ask me!”

“I mean, leveling up in *Cross Reverie* was piss easy, so I maxed my character’s level, but...”

Getting to level 99 was easy in the game so long as one kept playing at a decent pace, but to go over level 100, one had to clear challenging quests and go to great lengths. After that, gaining even a single level became much harder.

Diablo reached level 150, the max level at the time, which only a limited number of top players in the game reached. But Noah, by contrast, only played *Cross Reverie* on the side. How did she max out her level, then? Something about her explanation felt off.

“Tell me, woman. What level are you?” Diablo asked her.

“Me? I’m level 300.” Noah replied casually.

“Wh-Wh-Whaaaat...?!” Diablo’s jaw fell open.

This shocked him even more than her admitting to be a visitor to this world. Noah simply waved her hand dismissively, though.

“That’s not that impressive, at least in the year I came from. You said your level is 150, right? That was the max level back during the game’s golden days. That’d be five years ago for me, in that world’s time.”

“Kuh... So you’re saying you came from the other world, five years after I was playing the game.”

“You catch on quick. What, were you a sci-fi nerd?”

“They’d bump up the level limit once every six months or so, so I figured it would go over level 200 within five years, but...”

“Well, during the social game bubble, all sorts of games would pop up like mushrooms after the rain. *Cross Reverie*’s sales were being overtaken, so they revamped the system. They’d shower players with free gacha pulls and presents, so leveling up became really easy.”

Diablo fell into a sour silence. That explanation *did not* please him.

“The game’s balance tipped, and that only cut its lifespan short — or, well, that’s what people would say. I didn’t really care, since I never played *Cross Reverie*’s old balance.”

“The game’s developers were stupid,” Diablo spat out bitterly.

Whenever something became popular, derivative works naturally popped up. This was true for everything, not just the entertainment industry. And when an up-and-coming competitor starts overtaking an existing work, there are only a few ways of dealing with it.

For a game, one of those ways was tuning the difficulty. Making it easier to win and quicker to level up would flatter the players. But then again, where was the sense of reward in leveling up without any effort? Where was the challenge? Players would demand easily obtainable rewards, but dropping the

game's difficulty only served to drain it of what made it fun to begin with.

It's the struggle that made the achievement feel worth it!

Diablo sighed in disappointment, but it was then that Noah changed the subject.

"That's enough about *Cross Reverie*, though. I don't know the story behind how that game was made, but this world is a different place."

"So it seems."

"Personally, I see the life I lead here as my real life. So I won't go back... not to a life of being stepped on at every turn."

"No one treats you like that now that you're the minister, right?"

"Yeah. But I can't do it alone."

"Oh?"

"How did you come to this world? I was incarnated into this world as a baby. My parents died a horrible death, and that made me think I'd need to change Lyferia's political structure from the bottom up. No... I swore I'd change it. In front of their graves. Graves of soil, without any tombstones!"

"...It was different for me," Diablo said, a bit overwhelmed by her vehement words.

Diablo was summoned by Rem and Shera. It was technically a teleportation of sorts, although he did assume his game character's appearance. Noah's way of coming into this world was different, it seemed.

"I don't want to go back to that other world again," Noah told him. "My life in this world is everything I have. Everything that matters. And if I want to reform this country, it's not too late to do it now."

"Really?"

"The situation is difficult, yes, but... I do want to make Lyferia into a utopia. A country without discrimination or discord."

Building a country, huh...?

Diablo didn't care for that.

“Hmph... I can’t relate to that feeling, but I can at least understand what you mean. I don’t think it’s a mistaken idea.”

“There’s something I want you to answer,” Noah said, eyeing him seriously. “Why are you so... reckless? Nothing you do ever makes sense. Are you trying to get back to that world again? Is that why you’re doing whatever suits you?”

Noah seemed to misunderstand Diablo. He wasn’t doing whatever he pleased. If he could simply tell her he was a socially crippled gamer who could only talk to others by pretending to be a Demon Lord, things would be that much easier. But no matter how candidly they might answer each other’s questions, Diablo could never say that.

He couldn’t reveal his true self just as much as he couldn’t live without breathing.

Same as how an earthworm had no legs. As how a pillbug couldn’t fly. He couldn’t reveal his true self, no matter how much he might be misunderstood, mocked, or loathed for it. Even if it made his life that much worse, he simply could not.

“Hmph! Just like you chose to live as a minister, I chose to live as a Demon Lord. And that’s why the lives of the people of this land mean nothing to me!”

“I’ve been looking into the things you’ve done with my personal intelligence network,” Noah shook her head. “You’re not being honest.”

So she knows.

“What are you, some kind of stalker...?”

“The High Priest Lumachina wouldn’t place her trust in you if you were such a terrible person. She can tell between people who have good intentions and those who act out of malice.”

She can...? Then how was she duped by those villains for so long? No... It’s because she could see through them that they tried to take her life... If she didn’t see through them, they’d have just used her, and she’d have been safe.

“Do you know Lumachina well?”

“I’ve only given her my regards during the kingdom’s religious rituals. She

probably only knows me by name, too.”

“Then how... Did you meet her in the game?”

Diablo had seen some NPCs he recognized from the game walking around Faltra, like the clerks in the weapon and item shops.

“Lumachina had a special role to play in the game,” Noah nodded. “A special NPC in the game — we called them Admins.”

“Admins...?”

“I guess they weren’t called that back when you were playing the game? I mean, you met the Swordmaster.”

“You knew Sasara, too?!”

But what she said made sense, in a way. Sasara reached level 200 despite only training for a handful of years. A warrior like her was removed from the logic of this world.

“The Admins would give players difficult challenges to clear, and helped them level up in the process,” Noah continued.

“*Cross Reverie* was that kind of game...” Diablo nodded.

“But while Admins were granted special talents and powers, they had restrictions placed on them, too.”

Restrictions... Like Lumachina being exempt from God’s miracles, and Sasara falling into a deep slumber if she uses up her stamina. That made Diablo wonder if Rem’s aunt, Solami, was also considered one of those. He thought she was just the Fistmaster, but apparently that wasn’t the case.

“You met the Archsage when you broke the level 99 limit, right?” Noah asked him.

“Yes, because sorcerers had to clear that quest to advance. The Archsage, Marine... I think she was in the capital...”

“She got in the way of my plans, actually,” Noah explained. “So I sent her away somewhere else, so she can focus on her research.”

“Hmph... And?”

Diablo already broke the level 99 limit. He had no reason to meet with the Archsage Marine.

“Aren’t you limited by the level 150 limit?” Noah nodded with a nasty smirk.

Diablo immediately realized she was toying with him and held his breath.

“You don’t mean... There’s a way for me to break the level 150 limit?!”

“Do you feel like meeting the Archsage Marine now?” Noah said, beaming at him.

Going over the level 150 limit! This world was different from the game, so it wouldn’t be easy, but if Noah was level 300, he might be able to reach that same limit.

“If you value your life, speak! I’m not known for being patient!” Diablo said menacingly, drawing on her.

Diablo wasn’t sure if threatening a level 300 sorcerer would get him anywhere, but a Demon Lord wasn’t one to make requests.

“I’m the only one who knows where the Archsage is,” Noah said, shrugging. “I haven’t told the Palace Knights, either. I wouldn’t lose my temper if I were you.”

“And you’re not lying to me?!”

“Do I look dumb enough to lie about something this petty?”

Well, I’m a bad judge of character, either way!

But if she was lying, it would be a major problem later down the line. And since she brought it up, it probably meant that this was her bargaining chip...

Breaking the level 150 limit...! Diablo felt his pulse pick up in excitement and his palms grow sweaty.

“...Fine. State your conditions.”

“I think it goes without saying? I want to beat the Gelmed Empire, and I need you on our side to do it.”

“Have me help you?”

“I’ll be honest. I don’t like disobedient pawns. And I don’t like you.”

“Heh, it seems there is something we can agree on, after all. Because I don’t like being treated like a pawn, and I don’t like you, either.”

“Still, the Demon Lord Krebskulm seems to know something, and she insists that we need you to win.”

Klem did seem to know something about this entire situation, and it was the first time he’d seen her treat something that wasn’t related to food this seriously.

“But if you’re a level 300 sorcerer, doesn’t that change things?”

Honestly, if Noah was level 300, Diablo doubted he could beat her. According to the logic he knew, a level 150 sorcerer wouldn’t be able to even visibly damage a level 300 one. And even his martial arts as a warrior were only slightly above level 100. Anything Diablo could do would be child’s play for a level 300 sorcerer.

“I don’t know,” Noah shrugged. “I’ve never fought a powerful enemy.”

“Wh-What?”

“I told you I reincarnated as a baby, right? Well, once I grew older, I tried to see if I could cast level 300 spells. But I’ve avoided combat, so I never really tried to use offensive magic.”

“Why...?” Diablo asked.

Noah looked at him as if he was some kind of idiot.

“You do know that dying in this world means you *actually* die, right? Why would I put myself in that kind of danger?”

“Ugh...”

Diablo simply went with the flow, and that’s how he became an adventurer. He had no money, Rem was an adventurer, and Shera aspired to become one, so he simply went along with them. And most of all, all of the game’s players counted as adventurers.

But once he paused to think about it, being an adventurer was indeed a dangerous career in this world. And since Noah still had her knowledge from the old world, it only made sense she’d aim for a position of power in this world

instead of braving that kind of danger.

“This world has no concept of patent or antitrust law, so building up a fortune was easy. And with money, you can buy status. And once I had the social position I wanted, I never needed to fight.”

“So that was your plan...”

“And I thought it went well, too. But now it turns out I’d made a major miscalculation. I didn’t expect him to be that strong.”

“Emperor Gelmed...” Diablo whispered.

Noah turned her gaze to the east, where the black Magimatic Castle burned with a red halo from the rising sun at its back.

“Cooperate with us to defeat the Gelmed Empire, Diablo. If you do that, I’ll tell you where the Archsage is.”

Diablo responded with silence.

“Oh, yes, and just so you don’t say I lied to you later, I’ll tell you one condition that might scare you. You might actually think twice before saying yes after you hear this.”

“Mm? What?”

“Heheh... The Archsage, Marine, hates being around large groups of people. If you’re going to visit her island, you’ll have to go alone.”

“How’s that supposed to scare me?” Diablo cocked his head curiously. “Adventures are something you’re supposed to do on your own, anyway.”

Noah, who had been confident the whole time, suddenly winced.

“Wh-What are you saying?” she asked, visibly perturbed. “Questing in *Cross Reverie* was fundamentally based on six-man parties. Big events had parties form alliances to create teams of eighteen players!”

“That sounds disgusting,” Diablo said, frowning.

“...Maybe it’s not just that you came from a different time. Maybe you were playing a different game. The *Cross Reverie* I know might not be the same game you played.”

“Who knows?”

So he said, but he knew it was likely the same game after all. Noah was a functional member of society, and had the mind to aim for a position of authority in this world. Her way of life was completely different from Diablo's.

“So what's your answer?” Noah asked him. “Sorry if I'm being pushy, but I need to hear it now. I'd rather not wait until sunset if it means this city being blown away.”

That much was obvious. And Diablo knew he was no match for her when it came to negotiations. Noah had the edge in terms of bargaining chips and a way with words. He hated to admit it, but in that field, she really was on a whole other level compared to him.

He didn't know if cooperating with Noah, the Palace Knights, and Klem would really enable him to defeat the Gelmed Empire... But it would let him meet the Archsage Marine and break the level 150 limit.

The answer was clear. Diablo parted his lips and said...

“But I refuse!”

“Are you a complete and total idiot?!”

“Guh...”

“Isn't the Girl of the Vessel your wife?! And the Elven queen, too! You have your position as the King of Greenwood to consider! Put your petty obsessions aside for once and focus on dealing with this threat!”

It felt like he hadn't been scolded like this since he was in elementary school. He was holding back tears inside his heart.

“Shut up!” he lashed back at her, his voice coming out slightly high-pitched. “I am a Demon Lord from another—”

But it was then that someone else came out onto the balcony.

†

Two girls — one with black hair and cat ears, the other with hair like flowing gold — stood there. Rem and Shera.

“Diablo...”

“So this is where you were!”

Did they hear me? They must be disgusted...

So Diablo thought, but the two of them regarded him with a smile.

“...No matter what choice you make, I won’t go against it, Diablo,” Rem said.

“Wh-What are you talking about?” Diablo asked, perplexed.

“I talked it over with Rem,” Shera said, nodding vigorously. “And we both agreed that since we’re your wives, we have to believe in you. Because you’re our husband!”

“...And you’ve saved us so many times already,” Rem appended. “My life is yours, Diablo.”

“We’re only safe now thanks to you!”

“...So no matter what comes, I will trust you. Go down the path you believe in. You don’t need to worry about what we think.”

“Ahaha! I don’t think Diablo would worry about that anyway.”

“...Me and Shera will come with you no matter where you go. In the deepest seas or through the most furious fires. That’s the oath we’ve made.”

“Eternal love... That’s what the three of us promised each other. Right, Diablo?”

“...I-I meant I trust him as an adventurer...” Rem stammered, her cheeks flushing.

“Huh?! You say that now?! Rem, you promised Diablo eternal love too, right?!”

“Ugh... You can’t say that in front of him...” Rem mumbled, her face becoming even more red.

Shera writhed in place, her cheeks rosy, as well.

“Ooh, what are you getting so embarrassed over...?”

“...I-I’m not embarrassed... I’m sure Diablo understands how I feel.”

“You think?”

Their exchange gradually grew quiet, until they were essentially whispering at each other. Diablo, however, stood firm still. Their words were running around in his mind.



Noah turned her back to him and made to leave the balcony.

“I think our talk is finished. Do as you will,” she said with a sigh.

Diablo clenched his fist. He’d decided to protect what he held dear at all costs, no matter what he had to do. Even if it meant crushing his very soul!

How can I say I’m determined to defend them if I reject the safest, most correct answer?!

“...Fine. I’ll listen to you.”

“Huh?!” Noah turned around, her eyes wide with surprise.

Diablo struggled to breathe. The thought that this wasn’t the Demon Lord-ly thing to do was booming repeatedly in his mind like an alarm, and he broke into a nervous, cold sweat.

“I’m saying I... the Demon Lord Diablo, will lend you my aid! Until we defeat Emperor Gelmed!”

“That means I’ll be the leader,” Noah told him, narrowing her eyes. “And you’ll have to obey my every command on the battlefield. Can you promise that?”

If he simply replied to that with a resounding “Very well!”, it would be proof that he didn’t really understand the meaning behind her words. But he wasn’t a child like Klem. And so, Diablo simply nodded slowly.

“I admit it. You are the leader.”

He thought she might laugh at him. But instead, she regarded him with the most earnest, serious expression he’d seen her make yet.

“Thank you, Diablo. I will do everything to answer the trust you’ve placed in me.”

She extended her right hand to him. And after some momentary hesitation, Diablo reached his own hand out to hers and grabbed it in a handshake. As he did, Diablo pondered that he didn’t really understand what being a leader meant, nor what the true weight of responsibility was.

But Noah did know.

Even when he led Rem and Shera on quests, he didn't feel quite responsible for them. He never thought to act like a leader. And how much trouble had that brought upon them in the past?

As their hands parted, Diablo felt an odd sort of warmth remain. And with that sensation on his mind, he once again gazed at Noah.

Chapter 6: Getting Licked All Over

A large man, with a body far too muscular for a Human, greeted Diablo's group with his fist held against his chest in a salute. His face didn't fit his body, though. He had black-rimmed glasses, and his black hair was combed to one side.

"I'm sure you already know of me, but I am Maximum Abrams, captain of the Palace Knights. Ask me anything you'd like about the Order."

"Wait, are you saying I'm part of the Palace Knights now?" Diablo asked in a voice that sounded so fed-up he himself was a bit surprised by it.

Maximum didn't seem to take offense to it, though.

"That's what it means, yes. Same as the Demon Lord Krebskulm."

"Ugh..." Diablo grumbled.

"Wonderful!" Klem was overjoyed, though.

Apparently the fact Diablo was cooperating with them made her happy. But that's when the true hell began. The single most dreaded time was still ahead of him.

Self-introductions.

"I'm Alan! Pleased to meetcha, Diablo!" Alan said cheerily. "After we beat the Emperor's face in, let's have a go at it, you and me! Whaddya say?!"

"You can ignore everything this bonehead says," the Demon girl said, rolling her eyes. "Name's Daisy. A magi gunner."

Standing next to her was a tall Pantherian woman.

"I'm Chobi, a Lancer. We'll be counting on you, Diablo!"

"We definitely will!" A Grasswalker barged in, clapping her hands together in delight. "I saw you use that Lightning Storm spell without a magic circle or even any chanting. That was awesome!"

Judging by their appearance, they were a sorcerer. And also a girl.

“I’m called Utata,” the Grasswalker introduced herself. “I’m no good with summoning or offensive magic, so don’t expect any help from me when it comes to those kinds of spells, got it?”

She must use support magic... Is she the one who can get through Viovix’s barrier?

As that thought crossed Diablo’s mind, a male Elf stepped forward.

“Tch... I do not acknowledge this cretin as a comrade.” Thanatos the Undying glared at Diablo.

Diablo glared back at him. “Hmph... So you’re part of this Order. Surely you lower this party’s average level a great deal.”

“What was that, Diablo?!”

“Thanatos!”

But their feud was broken up by the presence of another man gazing at them, gasping heavily. The former Paladin summoner, Gewalt.

“Lo-ve-ly! ♥ Why, this is simply beautiful! Two handsome men, glaring passionately at one another... I’m shaking in my unmentionables~ ♪ And while you quarrel, your hatred gradually turns to love~”

““No, it doesn’t!”” The two of them found themselves barking at him in unison.

The atmosphere turned awkward, and Diablo and Thanatos both stepped aside. Diablo already knew about half of them, but he still couldn’t remember any of their names.

I’m bad at names.

Still, this time even Klem was involved, and Diablo thought she wouldn’t bother remembering the names of people from the races. But to his surprise...

“Hmhm,” Klem pointed at Noah and started moving her finger. “Noah, Maximum, Alan, Daisy, Chobi, Utata, Thanatos, Gewalt.”

“That’s a surprise!” Utata exclaimed, her eyes wide. “A Demon Lord

remembering the names of people from the races!”

“A Demon Lord is one who leads armies,” Klem said confidently.
“Remembering the names of my subordinates is obvious.”

Her words cut into Diablo’s heart like blades. Klem had potential as a leader, and remembered everyone individually. The realization that he was the only who was bad at this was a bitter one.

“Krebskulm, you work under me, remember?” Noah shook her head. “The members of the Order aren’t your subordinates. They’re your comrades. Equal to you in rank.”

“Mm! At least until we defeat the Emperor!” Klem said cheerfully.

Compared to the painstaking effort it took Diablo to steel his resolve, her answer was much more flippant. But either way, she seemed to be blending in with the group already. She was more outgoing than he thought. Diablo, however, could only glare coldly at Thanatos.

I knew joining a party was a bad idea...

He was regretting this already.

“All right, that’s everyone, Noah!” Alan said vigorously. “Let’s charge ‘em!”

Diablo agreed with him, but Noah shook her head in denial.

“No. None of us got any sleep last night. And that might not bother you, Alan, but it does bother us. Sorcerers in particular struggle to concentrate when they’re fatigued. We can’t fight if we can’t exhibit our full power.”

“Maaan, Sorcerers are wimps,” Alan sighed.

“For now, we can sleep until noon, then launch our attack during the afternoon.”

“Why not do it at night, then?”

“We’re not familiar with their castle’s layout, and some of us don’t have good night vision. If we have to attack, we should do it during the day.”

“Ya sure?”

“Most importantly, I don’t want to wait until sunset,” Noah said gravely.

“Oh, yeah, he said he’d shoot another big one at sundown, right?” Alan said, scratching his head.

“I’ll give the order to charge when we’re ready. If you don’t feel like sleeping, use the time to meditate.”

“Tch... Fine, fine.”

“Please prepare rooms for the Palace Knights,” Lumachina instructed the priests.

“Understood, Your Eminence!”

“Count Noah Gibun... Please come with me.”

“Yes, of course.”

As Noah followed the priests, Rem and the others gathered around Diablo.

“...Good luck,” she told him.

“Be careful, Diablo!” Shera exclaimed.

Rem and the others weren’t going to escort him to battle. That made sense. Even Diablo, who was level 150, was seen as an unreliable pawn by Noah, who was level 300. The rest of his comrades probably weren’t seen as potentially useful.

“If only I were thirty years younger, huh?” Sylvie scratched her head with a skewed smile.

“Hm? I thought Grasswalkers were always youthful and didn’t grow feeble with age,” Diablo remarked, cocking his head.

Sylvie simply laughed and said, “Naaah, it’s not like that.” Noah saw the ones who weren’t called to this room — Horn, Angeline and Riltiana — as non-combatants. Rose was still recovering from the damage she took. Rem and Shera looked at Diablo with tears in their eyes.

What does a... husband do in this situation?

Diablo stood frozen for a moment when he felt a tug on his sleeve. It was Klem.

“We have to get ready to attack later today! We need to sleep!”

“R-Right.”

“Demon Lord, guard? Guard!” Edelgard followed close after Klem, as if it was her natural lot in life to do so.

Noah seemingly allowed it, which implied that as a Fallen, Edelgard’s level was sufficient to be of use in this battle. Apparently, being around a Demon Lord for as long as she did also powered her up considerably. By that logic, Rem had grown much stronger, too... But in her case, the problem wasn’t her level. Bringing the Girl of the Vessel right into the Emperor’s lair was too dangerous.

And so, with Klem tugging at his arm, Diablo was torn away from Rem and the rest.

†

Diablo lay down on the bed in his room. Finally, he’d joined a party. Once before, he’d tried joining a party, only to quickly realize it was simply too much for him. Without even knowing what he did wrong, he’d angered people, was mocked by them, and then was kicked out. It was like he’d wandered into a minefield.

It was more impossible than any difficult game he’d ever played.

Compared to the monster that is interpersonal relations, facing the scariest final boss solo was much easier. And he thought he’d never join a party again after that.

But since he’d promised to help now, he would have to do everything he could. And Noah would be the leader. There was no doubting she was more suited for that role than he was.

“...Or maybe... I just don’t have what it takes to be a member of a party...”

“What’s wrong, Diablo?” Klem climbed onto his bed for some reason.

“Mm? Didn’t they prepare a room for you two?”

At the order of the High Priest Lumachina, Klem and Edelgard were given a room. There shouldn’t have been a reason for the three of them to sleep in one cramped bed.

“I thought I should give you some magical energy, Diablo,” Klem said.

“M-Magical energy?!”

“If you go to fight the way you are now, you might die.”

“You think my power is insufficient?”

“Your endurance is lacking! You were hurt when I threw a casket at you, after all!”

“Mm... That’s a thing of the past.”

When Klem awakened to the Demon Lord’s destructive impulses in Faltra, Diablo was forced to fight her. At the time, she threw a casket at him in her rage, which dealt a great deal of damage. Of course, he was also wearing different equipment compared to last time, and he’d since raised his level as a Warrior.

Still, Demons were a race with bad HP growths, and despite his high level, Diablo was indeed lacking when it came to endurance. His style was always to attack first and win quickly. By eliminating his opponents before he took damage, Diablo dealt with this weakness.

Was it possible to rectify it altogether, though?

“Do you intend to use some magic to strengthen me? It won’t work,” he told her.

The Demon Lord’s Ring would reflect it.

“I know that. But this should work.”

Really...?

Klem once reinforced Shera’s equipment, gave Rem a unique item, and healed and strengthened Edelgard multiple times. He wasn’t sure if those were things all Demon Lords were capable of, or if this was somehow unique to Klem, but...

Even a temporary buff would be welcome.

“Hmph... Very well. Do as you will.”

“Then I’ll do it!”

“Demon Lord... going to sleep? Not sleep? Not sleep... I think!” Edelgard

whispered with her back to the wall.

“Edelgard, come help me!” Klem called for her.

“Y-Yes...” Edelgard replied, her voice slightly high-pitched.

Was it from excitement? Delight? Fear? Diablo couldn’t tell. But Edelgard got on the bed too, and placed her hands on Diablo. They felt nice and cold, without a trace of Human warmth. It reminded Diablo of when a Lamia girl touched him. Lamias had scales over their skin, and so did Edelgard, though hers were smaller. They were rough, but not unpleasant or painful.

This might be the first time I’ve touched a Fallen...

That made Diablo a bit nervous.

“So? What does giving me magical energy involve? When you strengthened Shera’s bow, all you did was touch it.”

“That much is easy,” Klem nodded.

“And strengthening me is harder?”

“It is difficult! And it will take some time.”

“Well, that’s fine...”

He was still exhausted from yesterday’s battle, but whenever he was stressed from socializing, he couldn’t fall asleep. Lying down alone only made him remember all his failures, and he would stay awake until dawn, full of anger, shame, and regret. Speaking to Klem was a much better distraction.

But as that thought crossed his mind, he felt something warm and wet brush against his cheek.

Schlrp...

He’d... just been licked.

“Aaaah?! Wh-What are you doing, Klem?!” Diablo raised his voice and moved away.

“Hm? I’m strengthening you.”

“No, no, no... This is wrong. Why did you lick me?”

Klem cackled at him.

“I’m not going to eat you. Just stay put, Diablo.”

“That’s not what I meant...”

“I mean, you don’t look tasty, so why would I eat you?”

...So you’d eat me if I did look tasty?!

“Demon Lord... Giving magical energy... Very terrible!” Edelgard said, a serious expression on her face. “So stay, still? Still!”

She might have started licking him, but this was a magical ritual of some sort. Interrupting it wouldn’t be good.

“Hmph... Fine,” Diablo sank his body into the bed. “I leave everything in your hands, so do as you will.”

“Good! You’re obedient,” Klem nodded in satisfaction. “You’ve become mature, Diablo.”

Hearing that from a girl who placed the utmost value on biscuits felt like a backhanded compliment, but Diablo kept that thought to himself.

“Schlrp... Schlrp...”

Klem’s small tongue licked Diablo’s cheek. Edelgard was licking him, too — she brought her face to the nape of his neck and extended her tongue, touching his skin with its tip. It was thin and long, twice as long as any of the races.

She really is a Fallen...

Diablo trembled ever so slightly. It was ticklish. As he stirred, Edelgard pinned down his body with both hands.

“Ugh...”

She was serious about this. Her eyes were earnest, as if she were in the middle of combat. Maybe that was only natural, since they were in the middle of a ritual conducted by the Demon Lord she worshiped. Diablo lay on the bed cautiously. He thought this was just a pastime before he fell asleep, but it felt like he was being operated on as Klem and Edelgard’s tongues crawled over his skin.

“Schlrp... Schlrp...”

“Mm, mmm...”

“Grr... This thing is enchanted,” Klem grumbled, her fingers running over Diablo’s clothes. “It’s in the way.”

“Destroy it?” Edelgard suggested.

“W-Wait! The 《Ghost Suit》 is a piece of EX Rank equipment, as powerful as the 《Ebony Abyss》! It increases my stats and has preliminary healing and instadeath prevention effects!”

“Mm...” Klem hummed grumpily.

“Wait, I’ll take it off.”

I can’t just let them rip this thing apart. It’s not like a girl’s stockings in a porn video or something...

Diablo removed the Ghost Suit.

“Take off your bottoms, too!” Klem said with a smile.

“Huuuuuh...?!” Diablo exclaimed, aghast.

“Don’t you understand? If the ritual is incomplete, my strengthening won’t apply to your bottom half!”

“Nnng...”

The way she put it, it seemed any spots she licked would be strengthened and made more resilient. And as awkward as this was, he didn’t want to have his lower half be blown off by an enemy’s AOE attack.

Left with no choice, Diablo took off his pants. Klem and Edelgard waited for him to do so, watching with wanton curiosity.

“Ugh...” He fidgeted awkwardly.

Despite his misgivings, Diablo was now naked. Klem reached out for his exposed bits. As her hand grabbed hold of him, it felt like her warmth transmitted to his body.

“That’s what I’d expect of you, Diablo,” she remarked, a satisfied smile on her

lips. “Quite robust, for one of the races.”

“Big...” Edelgard said, her face drawing closer to him.

She extended her tongue. A ticklish, sweet stimulus jolted through Diablo’s spine. He couldn’t help but let out a moan.

“H-Hey, I haven’t even taken a bath yet...”

“It does smell of sweat a little.”

“Edelgard, don’t mind? Don’t mind!”

“Schlurp... It’s a bit salty.”

“Mmm, nnn... Tastes like, fish sandwich?”

Just don’t bite it off!

While he was still a bit anxious, he entrusted his body to the girls’ ministrations. Klem licked him gently, while Edelgard’s tongue slithered and coiled around his flesh, teasing him with its tip. Washed over by a sensation that couldn’t be attributed to just their tongues, Diablo felt his breath clog in his throat.

“Ugh...”

“Aaah, haa... Now then, this is where it begins, Diablo.”

So all you’ve been doing is licking me the whole time for no reason...?

Her tongue crawled over him. But suddenly, it felt as if electricity was running through his body, reaching deep into his core. It passed through his skin, into his muscles, and coursed into the marrow of his bones.

“Ah, ugh...!”

Edelgard licked wholeheartedly, as if lapping up nectar, pecking at him with her lips.

“Nnngh, schluuurp, mmm, nnnng...!”

“Ugh...”

“Haa... Nng... Amazing...” Edelgard said, entranced. “Demon Lord’s power... I can feel it... Aaah!”

“Heheh, do you like the taste of this Demon Lord’s power, Diablo?”

“Kuh...”

He felt hot. A warmth ran through his body, hot enough to make Diablo think it might burn his skin, but the pleasure was even more intense. It felt so good he couldn’t breathe. The unfamiliar sensation seemed to flow right into his bones, and Diablo had no means of stopping it.

His field of vision was flashing and flickering. It felt like his brain was about to exceed the limit of the stimuli it could withstand.

“Mmm, nng, schluuuurp, mm... Nnng, aaah... Mmm, nhaaaa!” The tip of Klem’s tongue continued sending magical energy into Diablo’s body.

“Aaaahaaa... Demon Lord... Demon Loooord...” Edelgard also devouringly moved her tongue, licking and slurping. “Aaah, aaah, aaaaah!”

Edelgard’s body twitched and spasmed excitedly. Klem wasn’t much better for wear, though.

“Aaah... Diablo... Diablo... Nnnng! Accept it! This Demon Lord’s... magical energy!”

A splashing sound filled Diablo’s ears as a warm fluid washed over him, clinging stickily to his body. It was wet and a bit yellowish. Edelgard was also doused in that fluid, twitching powerlessly.

...Was this really a magical ritual?

Diablo couldn’t help but ask himself that anxious question.

†

At the Magimatic Castle Viovox...

Standing atop a flat platform called the Eighth Deck was a golden Magimatic Sol.

Goldinus of the Gold.

There was no one else in sight... No one alive, anyway. All the Magimatic engineers that came to service the unit were killed, reduced to puddles and bits.

The area was warded off and designated a restricted area. The Gelmed Empire had no control over Goldinus. The strongest Magimatic Sol had finally found a compatible pilot, but with the chief Magimatic mage Doriadanph dead, the enslavement magic on said pilot had been undone. And while the Human within it could be devoured at the Emperor's will, he made no such attempt...

They believed the Emperor had judged that since there were no other Magimatic Sols available, Goldinus of the Gold would be allowed to remain active. Even if it was not on the Gelmed Empire's side, so long as it caused harm to the enemy, it was still beneficial.

The pilot disembarked, her feet landing on the deck, long hair fluttering in the wind.

"Aaah..."

Alicia Cristela. Her once red hair was now a brilliant shade of gold. Most Magimatic Sol pilots piloted nude, so as to maximize their contact with the machine. Alicia, however, was clad in a suit of black leather.

"Aah... The capital is... How beautiful..."

Her gaze was fixed downward, at the first district. It had been completely blown off, with even the ground carved away by the blast. More than half of it was already submerged underwater. She gazed at the obliterated town with ecstatic eyes. Saliva leaked from her parted lips, dripping into her cleavage.

She then turned her eyes to Castle Grandiose.

"Why would His Grace leave that despicable place intact...? He ought to have started with destroying the castle, first..."

"For there hides the Girl of the Vessel," a voice, thick with static noise, replied to her question.

There were no living beings in this place save for Alicia. She turned around, a grin on her lips.

"Is there any relation between His Grace's desire and the sublime act of wiping away the unsightly?"

"Should you ignore imperial orders..."

Alicia's eyes widened angrily.

"You still haven't learned how to speak to me properly, have you...? You pig."

"Ugh?!"

"Such an undisciplined animal."

"I-I am... the ultimate Magimatic Sol of Twilight..."

"You pig!"

"Nnngh... My... apologies..."

Her gaze was fixed on Goldinus of the Gold — or rather, its cockpit. Flesh-colored tentacles writhed within it. One of the tentacles slithered along the floor, slowly and almost fearfully as it approached her. It coiled around Alicia's leg, as if clinging to her. It climbed up her hip, eventually reaching her waist.

Transparent droplets dripped into the crevice of her groin. Alicia smiled.

"So ugly!"

Alicia stomped on the tentacle, loud enough to produce noise. A white, yellow sticky fluid squirted out of its tip. These tentacles served as nerve junctioning threads, meant to connect the pilot to the Magimatic Sol. Alicia wiped the sticky threads of fluid clinging to her abdomen with her hand and lapped them up with her tongue.

"You reek."

"Ugh..."

"Aaaah. You look oh so wretched."

Alicia's fingernails dug into the tentacle.

"O-Oiiink... M-Mooooore..."

"More? A pathetic servant like you has the gall to make demands for more from your mistress...? You still don't know your place, do you...?"

"Aaah?! Ugh... P-Please... Forgive me..."

"Heheh... Why should I keep bothering with such a disgusting creature? Stay here and rot until His Grace gives his orders."

“Aaah...” The tentacle shivered. *“N-Neglect...”*

The tentacle dribbled more sticky fluid.

“Aaah... This world really is...” Alicia whispered, an ecstatic smile on her lips.
“Really is full of muck and filth... I must hurry... Hurry and... destroy it all♥”

Afterword

The second season of the anime has been announced! Hurray!

The first season of the anime was quite well made and earned positive reviews all across the board. And thanks to that, a second season has been announced! I've been working on some of the scripts for it. Thank you, everyone, for all your kind support! I hope you look forward to it!

Now then, volume 13! I intended to finish the Empire arc in this volume but... I couldn't fit everything in this time. I'm sorry. This time, Diablo charged the castle with all his allies so far. I enjoyed writing it; it felt like a war record story. I do believe that a sense of adventure is what gives this series its unique identity, though.

I also finally got to make a few reveals I've been sitting on for quite some time. I hope you enjoyed them.

Next volume, Diablo will embark on a quest as a member of a party for the first time. A very high difficulty quest, indeed...

But after I've kept you waiting so long for this volume, I'll do my best to release the next as soon as possible!

Now, for some thanks...

To Takahiro Tsurusaki. A second season, my friend. A second season! Can you believe how far we've come?

To Ooishi, the designer from Afterglow. Thank you for all your help with this volume, as well.

To Shouji, the editor in charge of me. Thank you for all your support and encouragement when I couldn't find it in me to write. Thanks to you, I was able to publish yet another book.

To everyone in Kodansha's editorial department and everyone involved in the making of the book, and the family and friends who supported me. And of

course, to all you readers who took up this book. I offer you all a thank you of the greatest level possible!

Yukiya Murasaki

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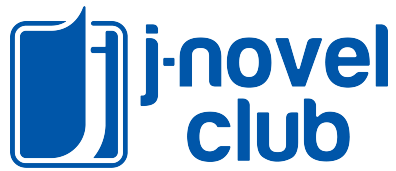
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How NOT to Summon a Demon Lord: Volume 13

by Yukiya Murasaki

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Ebook edition 1.0: December 2020

Premium Ebook